OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

RETRO GAMER

AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE

THE **AWARD WINNING** GAMES MAGAZINE

CLASSIC GAME

TOTAL ECLIPSE

REVISIT INCENTIVE SOFTWARE'S EGYPTIAN 8-BIT MASTERPIECE





20 YEARS OF SONIC

THE INDUSTRY'S FINEST CELEBRATE SEGA'S HEROIC HEDGEHOG

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

TREASURE
WE SPEAK TO THE CREATORS OF GUNSTAR HEROES AND IKARUGA

SMASH TV
THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO WILLIAMS' TWIN-STICK HIT

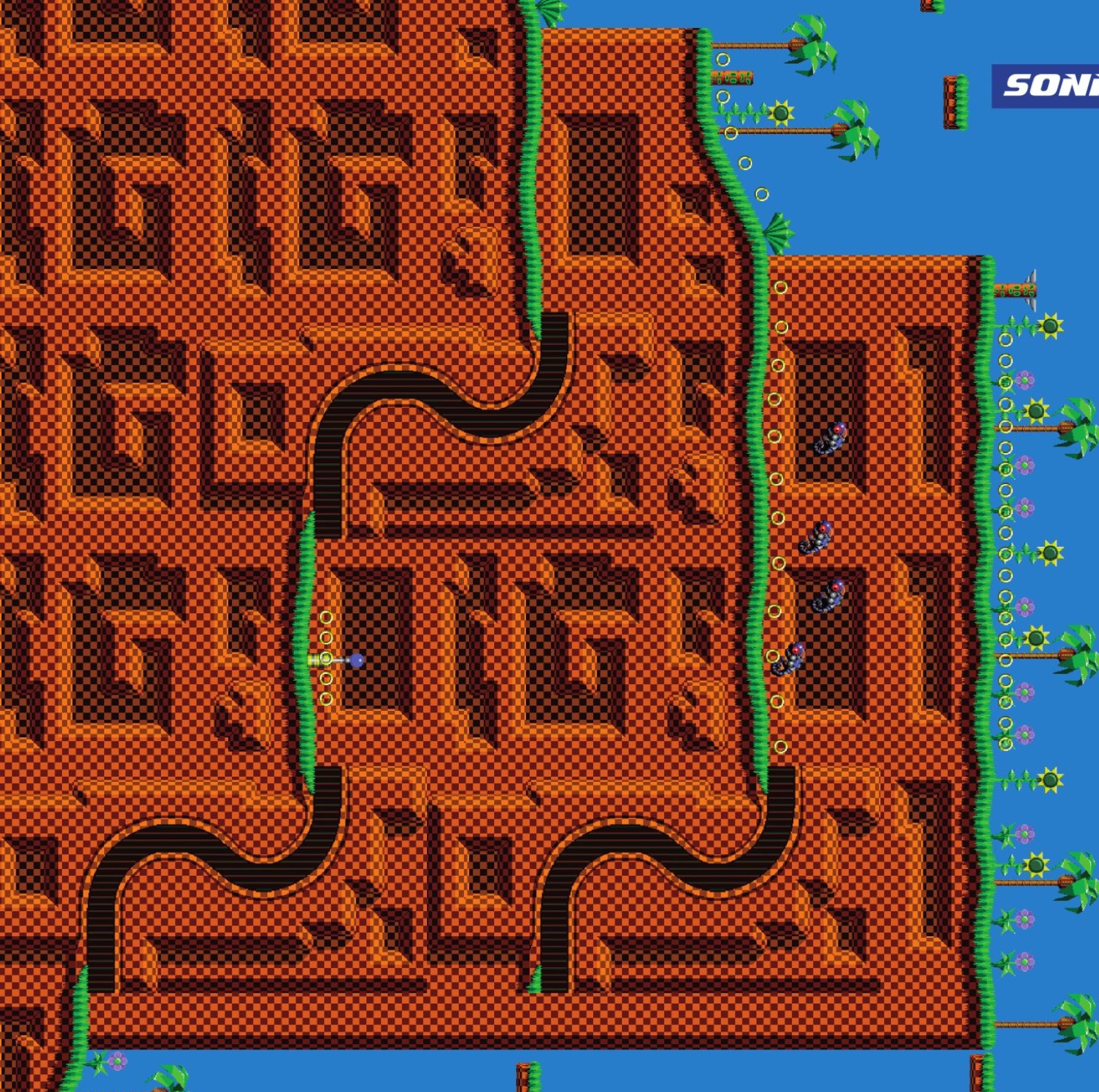
MICHEL ANCEL
THE CREATOR OF RAYMAN LOOKS BACK AT 20 YEARS OF GAMING

THE UNTOUCHABLES
FIND OUT HOW OCEAN CREATED ONE OF ITS BEST FILM TIE-INS FOR 8-BIT COMPUTERS

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ANNIVERSARY
20th
SONIC™
THE HEDGEHOG

SONIC TIMELINE



1991

- RAD MOBILE [Arcade]
  Sonic's first ever appearance in a videogame
- **SONIC THE HEDGEHOG [Various]**
  Sonic's first platform game. Total format sales: 15 million
- SEGASONIC COSMO FIGHTER [Arcade]
- WAKU WAKU SONIC PATROL CAR [Arcade]

1992

- **SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2 [Various]**
  The first Sonic game to feature Tails. Sold 400,000 copies in its first week. Has sold over 6 million units

1993

- **SONIC THE HEDGEHOG CD [Various]**
  The first main Sonic game not made by Yuji Naka. Has sold 1.5 million copies
- SONIC CHAOS [Various]
  The first 8-bit-only Sonic game
- SEGASONIC THE HEDGEHOG [Arcade]
  Introduced Ray the Flying Squirrel and Mighty the Armadillo. Played with a trackball
- SONIC THE HEDGEHOG SPINBALL [Various]
  Has a rollercoaster ride named after it at Alton Towers

1994

- **SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 3 [Mega Drive]**
  Sold over 1.8 million copies
- **SONIC & KNUCKLES [Mega Drive]**
  The first game to introduce Knuckles the Echidna. Sold 1.2 million units
- SONIC THE HEDGEHOG: TRIPLE TROUBLE [Game Gear]

1996

- SONIC BLAST [Various]
  Unlike Sonic 3D Blast, this is a 2D platformer
- SONIC 3D BLAST [Various]
- SONIC THE FIGHTERS [Arcade]
  The first fighting game to feature Sonic
- SONIC GAME WORLD [Sega Pico]
  An educational game, which wasn't released in Europe
- SONIC'S SCHOOLHOUSE [PC]

1997

- SONIC R [Various]

1998

- **SONIC ADVENTURE [Various]**
  Sonic's first proper 3D adventure. Sold over 2.5 million copies

1999

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG POCKET ADVENTURE [Neo Geo Pocket Color]
The first Sonic game to appear on non-Sega hardware

2000

SONIC SHUFFLE [Dreamcast]
Board game in the style of the Mario Party series

2001

SONIC ADVANCE [Various]
Sonic's first outing on a Nintendo console. Has sold 2.2 million units

SONIC ADVENTURE 2 [Various]
The first game to introduce Shadow the Hedgehog. Sold 1.44 million copies in North America

2002

SONIC ADVANCE 2 [Game Boy Advance]

2003

SONIC HEROES [Various]
Over 1 million sales in Europe

SONIC PINBALL PARTY [Game Boy Advance]

SONIC BATTLE [Game Boy Advance]

2004

SONIC ADVANCE 3 [Game Boy Advance]

2005

SONIC RUSH [DS]
The first game to feature Blaze the Cat

2006

SONIC RUSH ADVENTURE [DS]

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG [Various]
The first game to feature Silver the Hedgehog

SONIC RIVALS [PSP]
The first Sonic game to appear on Sony's handheld

2007

SONIC AND THE SECRET RINGS [Wii]

SONIC RIVALS 2 [PSP]

2008

SONIC UNLEASHED [Various]

SONIC CHRONICLES: THE DARK BROTHERHOOD [DS]
The first Sonic role-playing game, created by BioWare

2009

SONIC AND THE BLACK KNIGHT [Wii]

2010

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 4: EPISODE I [Various]

SONIC COLOURS [Various]
Sold over 2.18 million copies in just two months

2011

SONIC GENERATIONS [Various]
The first Sonic game to feature both Classic and Modern Sonic together





LOADING...

I'll never forget the first time I saw *Sonic The Hedgehog* in action. I was 18 years old at the time and was paying a visit to my local independent games shop, looking for something to spend my money on. It was there that I saw Sonic running through Green Hill Zone, and despite the high price tag – £55 for an American import copy – I knew that I had to own it.

The antithesis to Nintendo's *Super Mario* games, *Sonic* was fast, sated my arcade thirst and above all, was oh so cool. Later games in the series haven't always captured my interest in the same way as that first encounter, but he's obviously left his mark on a great many people. Just read this month's cover feature if you don't believe me.

While we've obviously dedicated a fair chunk of the mag to *Sonic*'s 20th anniversary – which, coincidentally, is the same day this current issue is on sale – we've not forgotten fans of other games either. So prepare to discover the secrets behind *Bugaboo (The Flea)*, *North & South* and *The Untouchables*, a complete guide to Eugene Jarvis's excellent *Smash TV*, an excellent exclusive interview with Michel Ancel and a rare behind-the-scenes trip to the awesome Japanese developer Treasure.

Enjoy the magazine,

THE RETROBATES BEST SONIC GAME



DARRAN JONES

Sonic CD for me. While *Sonic 2* was fantastic, *Sonic CD* had an epicness to it that the Mega Drive games just didn't have.

Expertise:
Killing expensive marine fish
Currently playing:
The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time 3D
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT

I'm going to be completely predictable and say *Sonic 2*. The game blew me away back in 1992 and remains Sonic Team's finest hour.

Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Sega Rally Online Arcade
Favourite game of all time:
Sega Rally Online Arcade



JASON KELK

Without a doubt *Sonic 2*. Everything that *Sonic 1* offered but ramped up a notch or two. Marvellous.

Expertise:
Bizarre pieces of 8-bit hardware
Currently playing:
Trouble Witches Neo!
Favourite game of all time:
Io



ASHLEY DAY

Easily *Sonic 2*. It took everything I loved about the original and refined it to a perfect gem – or emerald – of a game. This is still the best for me.

Expertise:
The games of Team17, the *Shining Force* series and the Amiga CD32
Currently playing:
The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time 3D
Favourite game of all time:
Shining Force III



DAVID CROOKES

The debut. We nipped out of school at lunch to go to Boots where they had it running. We were amazed and almost missed the afternoon's lessons.

Expertise:
All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
L.A. Noire
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



JOHN SZCZEPANIAK

Sonic X-Treme on the Saturn, because it was hilarious watching the endless saga of arguments regarding its unleaked beta.

Expertise:
Japan and anything obscure
Currently playing:
Zettai Zetsumei Toshi 3
Favourite game of all time:
Star Control II



Special thanks to Ollie Holmwood of www.soniczone0.com for the great map.

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FEATURED



RETRO REVIVALS

In the hot seat this month…









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Capcom's *P.N.03* was criminally underrated on its release, because people just didn't get it. Darran Jones fights its corner

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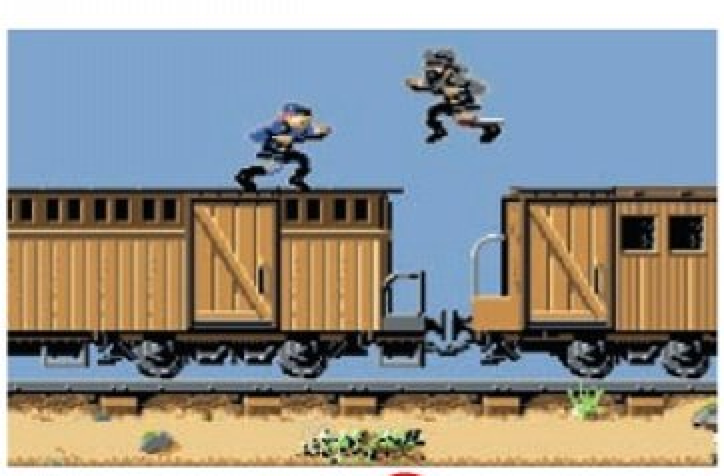
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Discover the origins behind one of gaming's funniest strategy games

ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED



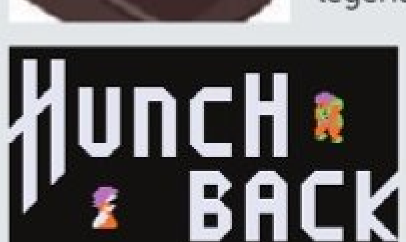


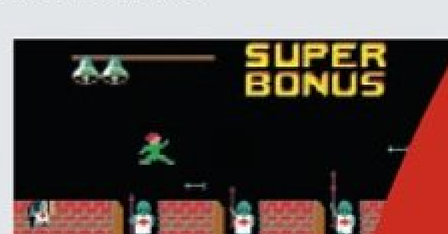
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Regular reader Alex Reeves examines Century Electronics' cult platformer and links it back to the legend of Robin Hood







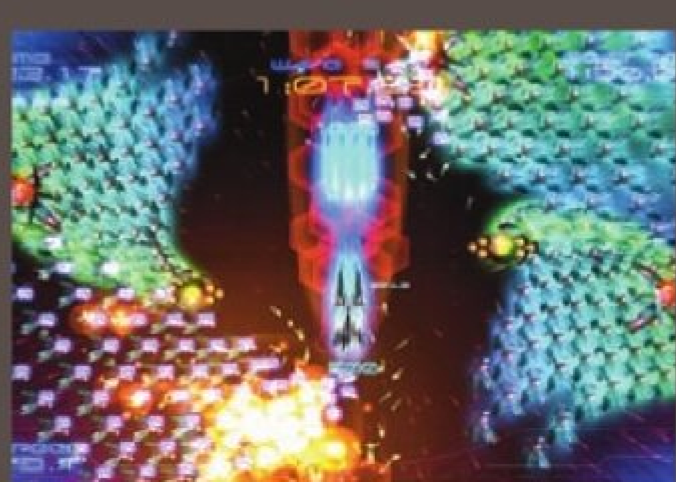
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>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> Paul Drury attended this year's RetroVision and gives a blow-by-blow account of events for those who weren't lucky enough to attend, or were there and just want to reminisce. In other news, we have a hands-on play of *Rayman Origins* and a look at Namco's incoming retro franchises. Enjoy.

* CONTENTS



LEVEL-UP!

NAMCO UNVEILS A BUNCH OF GAMES FOR RETRO LOVERS TO LOOK FORWARD TO



Normally we have to rely on the likes of Sega, Nintendo and Capcom to provide us with any incoming retro love. This year though, it would appear that Namco is interested in getting in on the act as well.

Its recent 'LevelUp' event in Dubai revealed that the company is intent on revisiting its back catalogue in order to ensure it has a healthy range of games that appeal to all types of gamers.

Arguably most exciting, particularly if you're a fan of beat-'em-ups, is the news that two of Namco's most influential fighters will be returning very soon. While Capcom is already busily beavering away on *Street Fighter X Tekken,* Namco revealed that it hasn't even started work on its own interpretation of the crossover yet, and is currently hard at work on *Soul Calibur V* and *Tekken Tag Tournament 2.*

Soul Calibur V is making us most excited, mainly because Namco is promising a complete overhaul of the franchise. Set 17 years after the events of *Soul Calibur IV,* the available trailer focuses on Patroklos, Sophitia's son, who looks set to be one of the main stars of the new gamer. Namco is remaining tight-lipped about the final cast roster, but has confirmed that it will feature newcomers and long-term favourites, as well as other children of older cast members. It's certainly a nice touch, and the new fluid fighting styles that have been promised make it sound far more free-flowing and exciting, but we can't help but feel perturbed as to what the offspring of Taki and Astaroth will look like.

Tekken Tag Tournament 2 is also looking highly promising. First announced in September of last year and due for release in the summer of 2011, the arcade game has since been pushed back to autumn 2011 due to Japan's tragic earthquake. Many were expecting LevelUp to feature news of the expected console versions, but no announcements arrived. However, Producer Katsuhiro

» [Xbox 360] It doesn't look like a typical *Ridge Racer* game, but *Unbounded* does look like a hell of a lot of fun.



* GO DEEPER

>> *Soul Calibur V* will feature each character speaking in their own national language. Make sure you switch the subtitles on.

>> While it's not retro, we heartily recommend that you keep an eye on *Dark Souls.* It's created by From Software and is an unofficial follow-up to the excellent *Demons' Souls.*

>> In addition to the *Tekken* arcade game, Namco announced a new CGI movie – *Tekken: Blood Vengeance.*

Harada has hinted on Twitter that if the game arrives (of course it will) we can expect additional extras like characters and gameplay modes. Considering Capcom is currently the king of fighters (see what we did there?) when it comes to making classy updates of existing beat-'em-ups, we're expecting Namco to follow suit.

It's not just fighting games that are getting us hot under the collar, as Namco has also been unleashing details on *Pac-Man & Galaga Dimensions*, the next part of its *Ridge Racer* franchise, a brand new *Armoured Core* and two more additions to its popular and

» [Arcade] No home console versions have been announced, but the arcade verrsion looks absolutely amazing.



> **"If you're a fan of role-playing games and beat-'em-ups then there's plenty to look forward to"**

long-running *Tales* series, which first started off life on the SNES.

Pac-Man & Galaga Dimensions is due very soon, and will be available on PSN and Xbox Live Arcade, as well as Nintendo's 3DS. The 3DS version is the one we're most interested in, as it will be featuring no less than six games, including 3D versions of *Pac-Man* and *Galaga*, the excellent *Pac-Man Championship Edition* and *Galaga Legions*. The final two games will be *Galaga 3D Impact*, an on-rails shooter that will hopefully be better than the recent *Yar's Revenge*, and *Pac-Man Tilt*, a 2D platformer that will utilise the 3DS's tilt controls. It's a shame the recent *Pac-Man Champion Edition DX* won't be included, but this is still looking like a decent package.

Ridge Racer Unbounded is also looking particularly interesting, although it appears to be a long way away from the previous games in the series. Smashing up other cars, racing through the smoking wrecks of other racers and smashing through buildings are traits we'd expect from a new *Burnout*, *Split/Second* or *FlatOut* game. Coincidentally, the game itself is being developed by Bug Bear, the creators behind *FlatOut*, which explains the similarities with that franchise. While it could be argued that the *Ridge Racer* series needs a shake-up, this might be a step too far. Time will tell though, and we'll have more news once we've had a proper sit down with it.

Last, but by no means least are two new additions to Namco's *Tales* series. The first game, *Tales Of Phantasia*, originally appeared on the Super Nintendo, but the series has since fragmented and spread to everything from the GameCube to the Xbox 360. The 3DS will be receiving a port of *Tales Of The Abyss*, which was first released in Japan for the PlayStation 2, while Namco will also be porting the 2010 Wii game *Tales Of Graces* later this year.

Needless to say, if you're a fan of role-playing games and beat-'em-ups then there's going to be plenty to look forward to. *

Highlights
» The games we're most looking forward to

Pac-Man & Galaga Dimensions



This 3DS package looks promising, even if we have no idea how effective *Pac-Man* and *Galaga* are going to be when portrayed in 3D (it's designed to look like you're peering into an arcade machine). The lack of *Pac-Man Championship Edition DX* is a disappointment, but it still looks like an interesting selection of games. Interestingly, *Pac-Man Tilt* will be the only game to not be in 3D, while *Galaga 3D Impact* will utilise a similar control system to Nintendo's own *Face Raiders*.

Provided this is released at a sensible price point, it could turn out to be very popular on Nintendo's 3D console. We certainly like the look of it.

Soul Calibur V



While *Soul Calibur IV* was enjoyable, it was a fairly safe fighter. Namco's sequel promises to up the ante considerably, with faster-paced combat, new and classic characters and a new story concerning the Soul Edge and Soul Calibur swords. Information is scarce, but we do know that characters will speak in their native languages, which should add a nice touch to proceedings. So far the only newbie revealed is Sophitia's son Patroklos, but expect more announcements over the coming months.

Ridge Racer Unbounded

We sooooo can't make up our mind about this one. While it looks an amazing amount of fun, coming across as the twisted lovechild of *Burnout*, *FlatOut* and *Split/Second*, it just doesn't look like a 'proper' *Ridge Racer game*. There's no denying that it has many series trademarks – a blinding sense of speed, huge muscle cars and insane drifting – but it just doesn't look the part. Of course, there's looking the part and there's feeling the part, and as we've not played *Unbounded* yet we'll reserve judgement. We're still utterly obsessed with *Ridge Racer 3D* at the moment, so we can certainly wait until next year when it's finally released.



THE RETRO DEBATE

» What namco games are you looking forward to?

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

gmintyfresh
It has to be *Soul Calibur V* for me; the opportunity to defeat all those cheesy online players with a difficult character like Nightmare is just too satisfying.

Mootown
Ridge Racer, although with it not being 'proper' Namco it worries me slightly...

Joey
Tekken Tag 2. The screenshots look great and, if it plays as well as the original, it's going to be a winner.

GigaPepsiMan
As much as I love *Ridge Racer* and *Tekken*, it is *Pac-Man* that seems to be making the biggest leaps and bounds now. Both Championship Edition games were incredible, and it is proof that you can't run an old idea to the ground if you use it right.

Rinoa
Pac-Man for me too. I really enjoyed *DX* – it was a great game!

Mero
The two fighters should be decent but I've just got to say that the new *Ridge Racer* looks to be absolutely dire. Bar a few exceptions, this is what happens when Japanese developers let Western devs loose with their IP: disaster.

thl
I go with *Tekken Tag Tournament 2*. Probably the only Namco fighting game that I'll get around to playing.

Shadowman
Tekken Tag 2 for sure. *TTT* is still my favourite *Tekken* game and this new one looks set to be as good as if not perhaps better than it.

SC5 will probably be at least decent, but I've not really enjoyed the later games as much as the DC version of *Soul Calibur*.

Liamh1982
TTT2, *SC V*, and *RR Unbounded* all interest me. They're series I enjoy, but I probably won't get to play them, what with not having a beefy enough console!

FORUM OPINION
What Namco games are you interested in?



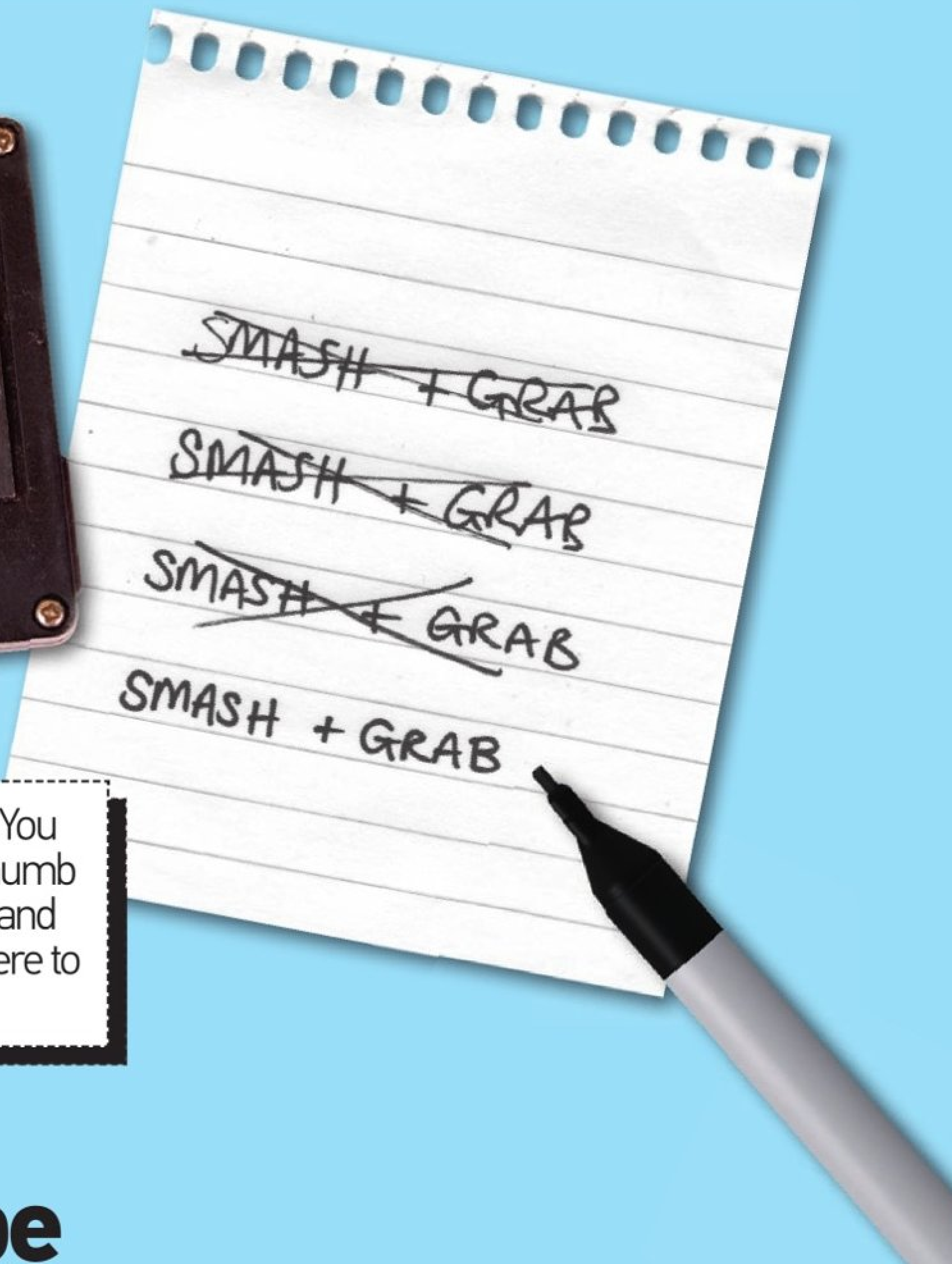
retro columns

>> RETRO RECOLLECTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

Here's the bio…

Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *Two Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.







Hi there. My name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro

Do not cross the tape

Oh, isn't the PS3 so smart with its neat and tidy discs? Isn't Microsoft so bloody clever by allowing you to store game data on a 'hard drive'? Isn't it wonderful we can access this information just by flicking a thumb? How happy are we that we can load up a saved game within seconds, without fiddling with loading levels? Isn't the world a safer place now that Bin Laden is no longer a threat?

The answer to all of these questions, and the one about whether or not you would like to imagine your parents having sex, is a resounding NO!

Kids these days don't know they're born. So hit them. Around the head. With a heavy book, possibly the Bible. That should alert them to the fact that they have been born and actually do exist.

Now you've got their attention, rub a load of cassettes in their spotty, stupid faces. Be quite rough. A diet of MTV, alcopops, glue, petty crime, casual sex and bad music has made them thick and unreceptive to anything that isn't voiced over by Dave Lamb or an American.

Tapes are fantastic and were a great part of playing old computer games. Would they work? Might they possibly snap? Is that Tipp-Ex mark that tells you where to have the loading level going to work for every game?

I know, I'm asking a lot of questions and giving very few answers. Tough. You'll thank me one day.

I have in front of me a bag full of old tapes stuffed with games and saved data that will almost definitely never be used ever again. (You always had to record the save data three times at different levels, just to make sure.)

It would appear that as a youngster I spent way too much time and money buying those C15 cassettes to tape games on. A few C90s were used – BASF was a favourite, just because I liked the case – and it would appear I even taped over *The Lotte Berk Exercise Class*, which carries the catchy subtitle of 'Get physical and lose inches and keep fit to music'. Snappy. And look, there's the little bit of white paper shoved in the hole, allowing me to record over it. No wonder I'm getting fat.

But by using a C15, I felt all proper and grown up. When really, I bet they worked out more expensive than buying a pack of Maxells. Boots was my favourite. The snazzy yellow and black looked so mature and scientific. The black and white of the WHSmith tapes left me a little cold. Too clinical for this child of the Eighties.

And wasn't it a joy trying to write in your best handwriting '*Smash + Grab*' or '*Elite* saves – Commander'? Now shake that case and its contents. Come on, isn't it a wonderful noise?

I recently handed a tape case to a friend of mine. He was unable to open it, saying it had been ages since he used one and he wasn't sure how to do it. There is no moral to this story; it just is what it is.

Tapes are fantastic and were a great part of playing old computer games

RETROVISION 2011

PAUL DRURY JOINS THE FLOCK AT THIS FLUFFIEST OF RETRO EVENTS



» RV: A very curious village…

I should have let people shoot Markie up the arse," bellows Beerman, stroking his beard. "How could I not have thought of that?"

Don't worry, folks; the friendliest retro gathering on the gaming calendar hasn't gone all *Deliverance* on us. Rather the homebrew coder and expert meat-burner is pondering additional gameplay features for his *Defender*-meets-the mutant-camels title, *Sheep Snaggers 2*, written especially for the show and featuring a giant ungulate bearing the striking features of RetroVision's founder, 'Markie' Rayson.

Held at the Folly Bridge Inn in Oxford at the end of May, RV certainly celebrated its tenth anniversary in style. Taking place later in the year than usual meant attendees could mingle outside by the BBQ, downing beer and catching up with old friends as well as making new acquaintances. **RG** and his old man got into the spirit and dressed up as Professor Layton and Luke, bumping into Ace Attorney Phoenix Wright on the way in – rather apt, given the forthcoming 3DS title to feature the trio.

Inside, away from the sun, gamers' fingers were kept busy with a large room crammed full of almost forty systems. Alongside the usual Nintendo and Sega suspects, we spied some rarities including the Panasonic Q, a Gamecube/DVD hybrid, and the unique Specadore, a C64 in ZX clothing, proving computer love can cross the playground divide.

Tournaments ran across the weekend, and the multiplayer *Tetris* DS contest, which allowed the audience to observe the block-battling on a big screen while contestants were hunched over their handhelds, was especially engrossing. The crown was ultimately claimed by Rinoa, who also took the prize for *Hamster Ball*, which resulted in a memorable 'one girl, two cups' photo opportunity.

StarshipCommand triumphed on both *Hyper Viper* – a vicious version of *Snake* reviewed in last month's **RG** – and *Sheepoid*, another game created especially for the show. Written by Richard Bayliss as a homage to *Lazer Zone*, it was the first time the respected coder had ventured to a retro event, and was "absolutely delighted" to see his previous work on sale at the Psytronik stall, which did brisk business on both days of the event.

The assembled herd also put their hands in their pockets for the charity auction, held on Saturday night. Hosted admirably by auctioneer Amy, a huge range of lots, including a *Back In Time 2* T-shirt signed by the late Richard Joseph and Llamasoft games autographed by Jeff Minter, brought the final total raised over the weekend to a staggering £1,400.

"RetroVision has always been a labour of love," grinned Markie from beneath his Ming the Merciless green face-paint, "but this time, as it's been ten years of RV, we really wanted to give something back to the people that got us here. So it's a free event but we are raising money for cancer charities. This year, we've lost two very dear people, Ian 'Elizian' Muir and Paul 'DJ Skitz' Hadrill, to cancer. This is dedicated to them."

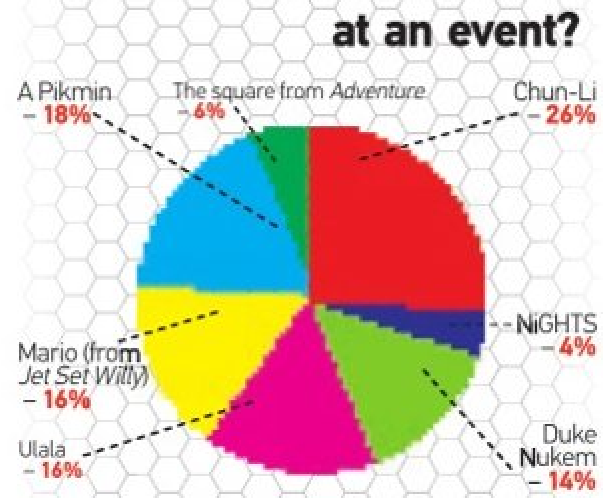
To donate money and find out about next year's event, just visit www.retrovision.org.uk.



FORUM OPINION

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

What character would you like Darran to dress up as at an event?



"Can you get Darran to dress up in a Chun-Li costume and get him to attempt a spinning bird kick? Then can you post a massive picture of it in **RG** so I can have a jolly good laugh?" – **gman72**

"If Chun Li wins I DO NOT WANT TO SEE HIS SPINNING BIRD KICK." – **RichL**

"I think he should dress up as Princess Peach and do another Kinect dancing vid… I'll happily supply a little wand and some fairy dust." – **FatTrucker**

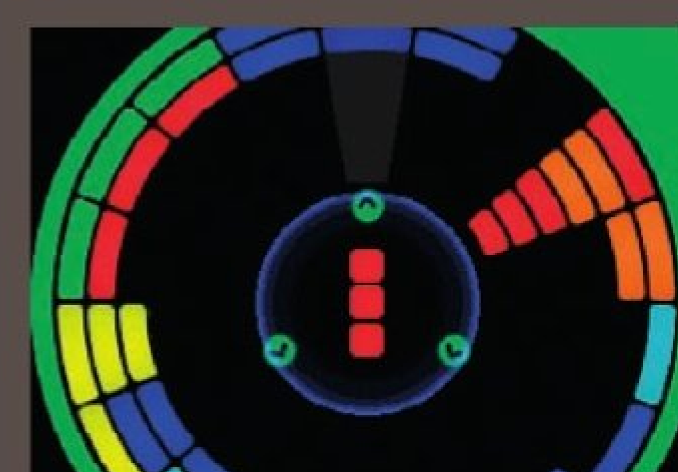
MICROBYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



>> Squij Search

At the RetroVision event, we were duly impressed with the Psytronic stand, which proudly showcased all 20 of its premier releases in fancy packaging. Kenz, who revived the label in 2008 after its short existence in the mid-Nineties, is especially pleased with the Amstrad CPC conversion of *Sub Hunter*, and revealed another new C64 release: *Flubble And Squij*, a 'lost' title from the label's first life. See www.psytronik.net for more.



>> Into a Circle

What happens when a champion player turns game-maker? *Tetris* master James Clewett has found time while completing his PhD in non-equilibrium thermodynamics (us neither) to answer the question with *Concentricity*. It's a fantastically addictive, elegantly presented puzzler with a personality all its own. Available for just 59p on the App Store, you can see the game in action at www.jamesclewett.com.



>> Cities Sickness

After gracing the cover of **RG88**, *Missile Command* may be hitting the silver screen. Fox has picked up the film rights and scriptwriters at a Hollywood studio are penning a storyline, which, if it's faithful to the game, should have a very bleak ending. World champion Tony Temple and his entertainingly deranged rival Roy 'Mr Awesome' Shildt are rumoured to have cameos, which should mean the DVD extras are at least worth seeing.

retrocolumns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years

Toot toot Sonic warriors

I once emailed the music lead of Sonic Team to thank him for making me cry all the time. I didn't hear back, though.

When I joined the games magazines in 1992, *Sonic The Hedgehog* was the one game we all had in common. Everybody was playing *Sonic*. Trend-setting *i-D* magazine had Sonic on the cover. It was Sonic fever from every kid's bedroom to student shared accommodation.

As far as British gamers are concerned, I'm giving credit to *Mean Machines* and *C&VG* for breaking the news. Mega Drive was a specialist console beforehand, despite having *Castle Of Illusion*. Sonic arrived just under a year later to start the mascot war with Mario, and *Mean Machines* was where the hype started. Just one screenshot of the bonus stage, completely abstract, but we were all waiting to know more.

Sonic was fast, especially at 60Hz. Folks who only ever played *Sonic* at 50Hz never lived. But on flicking the switch on my converted Mega Drive – what an awesome name for a console – it wasn't just the full screen of blinding colour and rapid left-to-right scrolling that struck me.

The music needed to be fast too, or it lost the will to live. Play the game slowly, sure, but how could anyone stand the funeral march of *Sonic* at 50Hz? *Sonic The Hedgehog* made music important too – Sonic Team's unsung success story, in my view. You've got the theme in your head now, haven't you?

Yuji Naka's Sonic Team was a band of magicians. When you meet Yuji Naka he's such a quiet and serious guy, but the entertainment he's directed is so full of joy and bursting with optimism. I'm sure he's on a kind of Blues Brothers mission from God to make games mean more than guiding an avatar through a series of goals.

Sonic Team cared. It gave us something through games that we couldn't easily find elsewhere. It was high spirits in the face of adversity, basically. That's what shines through in the *Sonic* theme song, and absolutely pours from *NiGHTS* in its entirety.

Imagine *Sonic* without the music, or with dull music; if the bonus stage just played some crappy fairground scales. It wouldn't have been the same, and I'd wager might not have enjoyed the same success.

Sonic Team's *Samba De Amigo* brought all that sunshine and blazed brilliantly with everything that the sound team knew best, a game with the sole purpose of making everybody so, so happy.

If you're reading this, Mr Naka, I really want to say thank you for bringing so much joy with Sonic Team. You changed the world by making *Sonic* warriors of us all.

And if musician Jun Senoue is reading this too, thanks for making me cry all the time.



Yuji Naka's on a Blues Brothers mission from God to make games mean more

BACK TO BASICS

WE TAKE A HANDS-ON LOOK AT MICHEL ANCEL'S NEW RAYMAN GAME, RAYMAN ORIGINS

It's rare that Retro Gamer gets to leave the office, and rarer still to speak to Michel Ancel – see our exclusive interview on page 86 – so when the opportunity came up to do both, we jumped at the chance.

Rayman Origins has currently been announced for both the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. Originally due to be an episodic download title, it has now been confirmed as a full-price retail release and will be available towards the end of the year.

The game itself looks absolutely beautiful, with a fantastic 2D representation of Rayman's world that allows the screen to zoom in and out to cater for four-player action. Compared to recent four-player games such as *Moon Diver* and *New Super Mario Bros Wii*, the gameplay is far less chaotic – although the ability to punch and kick each other is bound to bring out the competitive side in some players – and there are none of the issues that made playing Nintendo's game with a full complement so frustrating.

What we really enjoyed about *Rayman Origins*, though, is how much it feels like a traditional 16-bit platformer. There's a significant emphasis on discovering hidden items and revealing new areas, which gives the game plenty of replay value. It's also full of humour and isn't afraid to reference modern games – there's a fun take on *Angry Birds* in there, for example – while there are plenty of returning characters from the original game.

Needless to say, you can expect a review towards the end of the year.





» [Xbox 360] The hand-animated art style really is beautiful. It's going to be a pleasure to see the final game.

THE Vault

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO CHEST

TREASURE OF THE MONTH



Neo Geo Consolized MVS

- **RRP:** $650 (around £400)
- **Buy it from:** www.analogueinteractive.com

With consoles such like the Fairchild VES and Atari VCS doing their bit for walnut appreciation back in the Seventies, the integration of wood into games consoles is nothing new. In fact, it's the exact opposite. However, this stylish and contemporary-looking Neo Geo console doesn't just take the material and use it as an unsubtle design flourish; it's entirely encased in the stuff.

Created by the clever bods at US Analogue Interactive, its team of retro gaming Heston Blumenthals have consolised a Neo Geo's MVS, and, in a nutshell, basically put it in a nutshell.

The console's sturdy, clean, screw-less construction certainly makes it a trendy-looking piece of kit, while the large array of A/V outputs found on its back ensure its compatibility with most entertainment rigs. It also comes packed with a component lead, so those with LCD tellies can begin playing straight out of the box, though you will need to pick yourself up an AES controller and a few games to get you started, as neither are included.

While we haven't had a hands-on with the machines ourselves (though there's an excellent video review of the machine up on electricpig.co.uk), we hear that its build quality is excellent – though at a price of $650 (around £400) you would hope so. Just don't sit it down near a fireplace.

Pac-Man wind-up racers

- **RRP:** £6.99
- **Buy it from:** www.forbiddenplanet.co.uk

These wind-up racing cars, based on the famous yellow-dot-devourer and his spectral tormentor Blinky, enable you to re-enact your favourite action scenes from the classic maze chase game. Simply construct an elaborate maze using old VHS or game boxes, shower it in grapes, wind these little suckers up and away you go – you now have a physical game of *Pac-Man* you can play on your floor. What could be better (well, other than owning the actual arcade machine, of course)? The cabinet is far pricier though, and does takes up quite a bit of space.





1up mushroom USB lamp

- **RRP:** $9.99
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Getting annoyed at yourself for constantly setting your laptop down in dark and dimly lit areas of your home? Prefer videogame mushrooms over actual ones? Do you own a computer? If you answered 'yes' to these questions then we suspect you'll be interested in these USB desk lamps. Based on the iconic *Super Mario Bros.* mushrooms (and available in a choice of two colours: red or green), the light-giving devices can be hooked up to computers (or will run independently with batteries), and with a single press of their bulbous spotted faux-fungal heads illuminate any workspace.

Golden Axe T-Shirt

- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

We turn the attention of fans of Sega's classic 1989 swords-and-sandals beat-'em-up *Golden Axe* to Retro GT this month, as it has recently added to its website this natty-looking T-Shirt based on the game. Featuring a cartoonish render of main hero Ax Battler, and showing the barbarian in the process of topping his power meter up by slaughtering one of those poor little imp characters with his broadsword (a hefty kick usually suffices in the game), we really like the humorous feel of the image, and look forward to seeing what future designs the guys have in the pipeline.



GT Omega Racing Simulator

■ **RRP:** £279.95 (basic model), £349.95 (Pro model)

■ **But it from:** www.gtomegaracing.com



Billed as the ultimate racing cockpit, the GT Omega Racing Simulator provides a solid-chassis, fully-adjustable, life-size racing seat. Coming in two flavours, the basic model offers a sturdy chassis and connectivity for a range of popular racing wheels, and a full-size racing seat in red-and-black faux leather. The Pro version (pictured) adds a VESA mount for your monitor, a console table, a gearbox mount, twin speaker stands, and a 360 swivel keyboard and mouse platform that can be mounted on either the left or right side – everything you need to experience a full racing experience in the home and bring your redline racing fantasies to fruition.



Sonic Jam

■ **RRP:** £19.95

■ **Buy it from:** www.retro-play.co.uk

If you've read our exhaustive feature on Sonic this month, and it's left you wanting to replay some of the blue blur's classic adventures, you could do a lot worse than pick yourself up a copy of *Sonic Jam* for the Saturn. Containing both original and subtly remixed versions of the main Mega Drive games in the series, all presented via a jaggy-looking 3D *Sonic* Hub World that acts as a tepid 3D *Sonic* game and decent virtual museum of character art, merchandise and music, it's certainly one of the more interesting *Sonic* collections Sega's put out.

Console controller soaps

■ **RRP:** $9.99

■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Let's be honest: soap is up there with some of the last objects you would ever associate with videogames. The two things couldn't be further apart. Cartridges, cassettes, floppy disks and compact discs containing several hours of interactive entertainment, and soap – something that works in partnership with water to keep you clean. That being said, sometimes getting sucked into engrossing virtual worlds can cause you to forget to do stuff in the real one, such as wash. Thus, we guess these controllers could be used as extremely useful *Inception*-style totems to remind you where virtual worlds end and the real one starts.



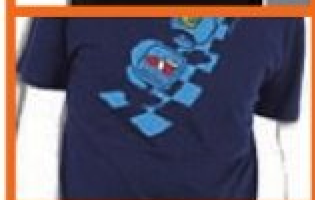
TOP FIVE T-SHIRTS



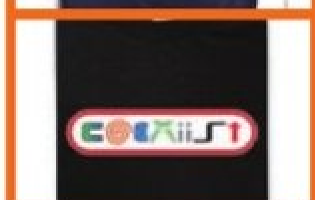
01 Beheaded T-shirt
■ **RRP:** $24 (approx £16)
■ **Manufacturer:** Meat Bun
■ **Buy it from:** meatbun.us/store/



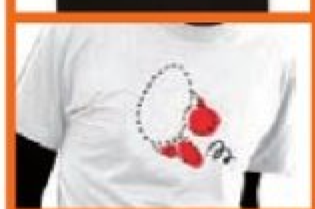
02 Amstrad
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



03 Sonic Power-ups
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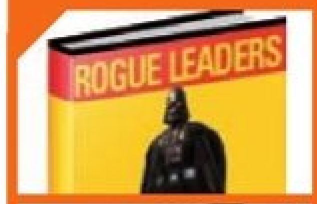


04 Coexist T-shirt
■ **RRP:** $15.99 - $17.99
■ **Manufacturer:** Thinkgeek.com
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Dizzy
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

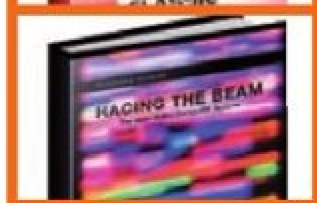
TOP FIVE BOOKS



01 Rogue Leaders: The Story Of LucasArts
■ **RRP:** £34.99 ■ **Publisher:** Titan Books
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



02 Classic Home Video Games 1985-1988 ■ **RRP:** $55 (approx £34)
■ **Author:** Brett Weiss
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.com



03 Racing The Beam
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Publisher:** MIT Press
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



04 Game Over
■ **RRP:** £22.14
■ **Publisher:** Cyberactive Media Group
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Gamespite Quarterly: Issue 3
■ **RRP:** From $12 ■ **Author:** Jeremy Parish
■ **Buy it from:** www.gamespite.com

TOP FIVE MISCELLANEOUS



01 Mega Drive Card Holder
■ **RRP:** $34.10 (approx £21)
■ **Manufacturer:** Banpresto
■ **Buy it from:** www.strapya-world.com



02 Grow Your Own Moai Statue (aka DOH)
■ **RRP:** $5.99 (£4)
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



03 Retro Videogame Propaganda Posters
■ **RRP:** £33 ■ **Manufacturer:** Steven Thomas ■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



04 Headcrab Plushie
■ **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
■ **Manufacturer:** Unknown
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Namco Dioramas
■ **RRP:** £5
■ **Manufacturer:** Namco
■ **Buy it from:** www.japantrendshop.com



*A MOMENT WITH... Steve Wilcox

Every issue, we put an industry veteran in the hotseat. This month, David Crookes met Steve Wilcox, managing director of Elite Systems

Who is Steve Wilcox?

Elite's first title was *Kokotomi Wilf*. As the years went by, the firm gained a reputation for publishing official licensed versions of TV shows such as *The Fall Guy* and *Airwolf*, and ports of popular coin-op titles, among them *Paperboy* and *Ghosts 'n' Goblins*. Elite still publishes *Paperboy* today, and it is also scouring the land for old Spectrum games for purchase via its Spectrum iPhone app.

Which of your games would you recommend to our readers and why?
While they're not strictly (or even loosely) 'our' games, *Bombjack* and *Paperboy* have clearly stood the test of time.

What is your proudest memory?
There are lots. Still being here and 'at it' 27 years in is a constant source of satisfaction.

What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?
Technically, the early attempts at rigid-body physics in our driving games (such as *Test Drive: Off Road*) in the mid-Nineties. Commercially, raising the finance to fund the manufacture and the import of our first Nintendo games in the early Nineties. We had to raise about £2 million to finance the first shipment of stock of *Dragon's Lair* for the NES and SNES.

Which industry veteran do you admire?
Among the technical guys I admire pretty much anyone who developed successful, original games in the Eighties and is still doing so today. Among the business guys, the Guillemot brothers – Yves at Ubisoft and Michel at Gameloft. Honourable mentions would go to Ocean's David Ward, US Gold's Geoff Brown and pretty much anyone who's had to put up with working with me for any length of time since 1983 – and that would include my dad.

How would you like to be remembered?
I'd like us to be remembered as the first, significant, officially licensed, European home computer conversions of the now-classic coin-operated arcade games. We published some amazing games like *Commando*, *Ghost 'n' Goblins*, *Ikari Warriors*, *Paperboy* and *Bombjack*.

Which game do you wish you'd made?
Going back 30 years, I would have loved to have made *Space Invaders*. And 20 years ago, *Tetris*, would have been brilliant. Ten years ago it would have had to have been *Bejeweled*. And now, *Angry Birds*.

What opportunities has making videogames given you?
Almost all of them, but, most importantly, and personally, the opportunity to 'plough my own furrow' for better or for worse.



» [System Name] *Kokotomi Wilf* was the first game published by Steve Wilcox's Elite Systems in 1984.

> "Still being here and 'at it' 27 years in is a constant source of satisfaction"



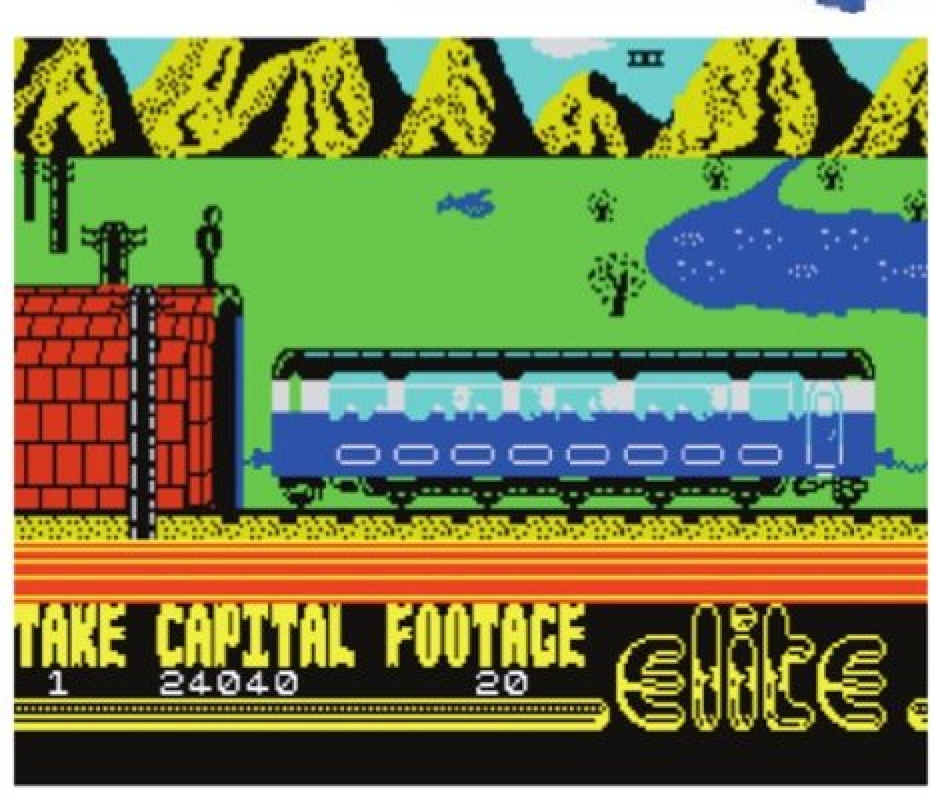
What's your darkest memory of being in the games industry?
Trying to raise that £2 million and having to let good people go.

And your best?
I have far too many great memories to mention, and they're still being created.

Can you share an interesting anecdote about your time in the industry?
In 1985, I arrived at the JAMMA Show in Tokyo. I turned up at the show with a sheet of A4 paper on which I'd had the phrase, 'Hello I'm Steve from Elite, I'm here to buy a licence to re-make your games' translated into Japanese. I was the only European at the event. I was treated like royalty and I went home with licence agreements to re-make many of the best arcade games of that or any other time.

How has the industry changed over the last 20 years?
Well, 20 years ago, I knew many of the 'movers and shakers' in the business throughout the world. Today, the business is probably too big and too diverse for anyone to be able to say that. *

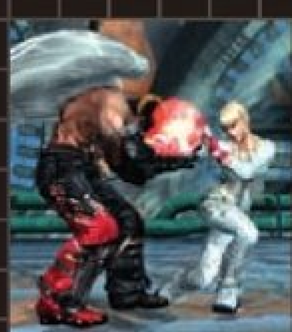




24 June – 21 July

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>> A month of retro events both past and present



24 June 2005
■ The hit arcade game *Tekken 5* is released on the PlayStation 2 in the UK and Europe.



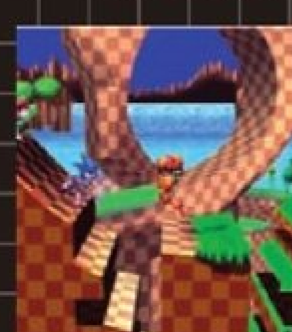
25 June 1993
■ LucasArts' sequel to its *Maniac Mansion* adventure, *Day Of The Tentacle*, is released on the PC.



25 June 2009
■ The Zeebo System debuts in Brazil. Targeting developing markets, software is only available through downloads in order to thwart piracy.

26 June 1987
■ The first models in Acorn's Archimedes range of computers is released in the UK.

28 June 1972
■ Atari Inc is founded by Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney.



27 June 2008
■ *Super Smash Bros Brawl* is released in the UK on Nintendo's Wii, letting fans pit Mario against Sonic.



27 June 2003
■ *Sonic Adventure DX* is released by Sega in the UK on Nintendo's GameCube.



27 June 1983
■ This is the Age of Aquarius. Mattel thought so, releasing its Aquarius computer in the US. It was discontinued four months later…



30 June 1948
■ Oliver Frey, artist and illustrator to Newsfield Publications' many games magazines, including *Crash*, *Zzap!* and *Amtix*, is born.



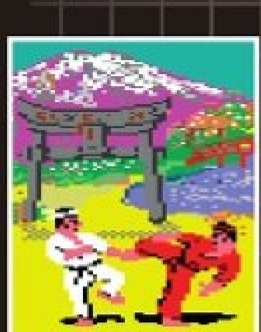
1 July 1986
■ The Twin Famicom console, a combination Famicom and Famicom Disk System, is released exclusively in Japan.



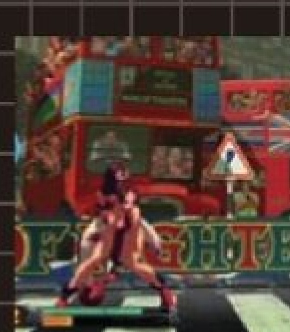
5 July 1987
■ The first game in the *Leisure Suit Larry* series, *Land Of The Lounge Lizards*, is released in the USA on the PC and Apple II.



6 July 2001
■ The European Dreamcast version of *Crazy Taxi 2*, the sequel to Sega's ever-popular score-attack game, is released.



15 July 1985
■ The Spectrum and C64 versions of *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* from Melbourne House karate chop their way onto shop shelves.



14 July 2010
■ SNK Playmore releases the latest instalment of its flagship fighting franchise, *The King Of Fighters XIII*, in arcades.



8 July 1995
■ Sega's new console, the Saturn, is officially released in the UK.



7 July 1986
■ *Heartland*, an arcade adventure by Odin Computer Graphics, is released on the Spectrum



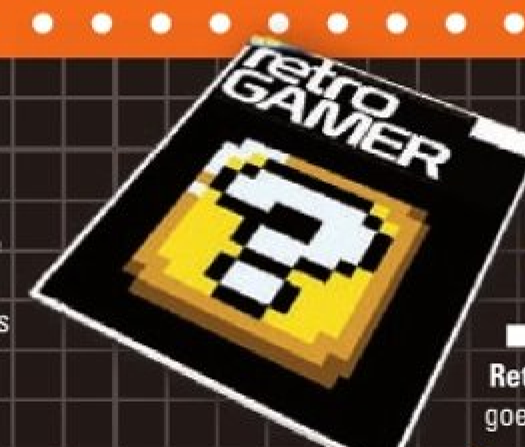
15 July 2003
■ LucasArts releases *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic* on the Xbox. Set 4,000 years before *Episode I*, *KOTOR* was critically acclaimed.



16 July 1995
■ Namco releases *Rave Racer*, an arcade coin-op sequel to *Ridge Racer*. No console versions were converted.



21 July 1995
■ Nintendo releases the Virtual Boy console in Japan. The red/black coloured graphics and lack of games hampered any chance of success.



21 July 2011
■ The new **Retro Gamer** goes on sale.

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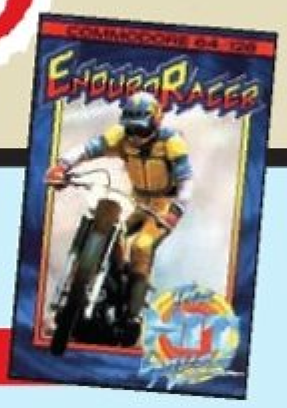
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BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



CHARTS



JULY 1989

COMMODORE 64

1	Enduro Racer (Hit Squad)
2	RoboCop (Ocean)
3	Postman Pat (Alternative)
4	League Challenge (Atlantis)
5	1942 (Encore)

» [Spectrum] Would Ocean's sequel to one of the bestselling Spectrum games ever be any good? Well, yes actually…





THE LATEST NEWS FROM SEPTEMBER 1989

SEPTEMBER 1989 – moment of truth for Konix, Sam ready to go, Atari goes retro, Coleco a no-go, Ocean rises with RoboCop sequel and Virgin takes on some unfeasibly large testicles. Richard Burton has his wheelbarrow at the ready…

The ongoing soap opera that was the Konix Multisystem console finally appeared to be heading towards the closing credits with the official release announced for the Personal Computer Show at Earls Court at the end of the month.

Everything was ticking along nicely, with a host of software houses working on new titles or conversions of their own hits. Llamasoft had *Mutant Camels '89* in the pipeline, an updated version of Jeff Minter's *Defender*-style game.

System 3 was working on *The Last Ninja 2*, Logotron on an enhanced version of its fast-paced and overrated shooter *StarRay*, and Argonaut Software promised the exciting prospect of *Revenge Of Starglider*, a game that would be well-suited to the Konix's Power Chair attachment. Argonaut had already finished one game, *Bikers*, which would be on disk and bundled with the system when released.

Of course, this would all be conjecture if the console failed to reach the marketplace, which it did. Teething problems included noisy gearing on the Power Chair, which reputedly also failed safety standards. The final ignominy was that the Multisystem and Konix failed to turn up for their moment in the limelight at the PC Show…

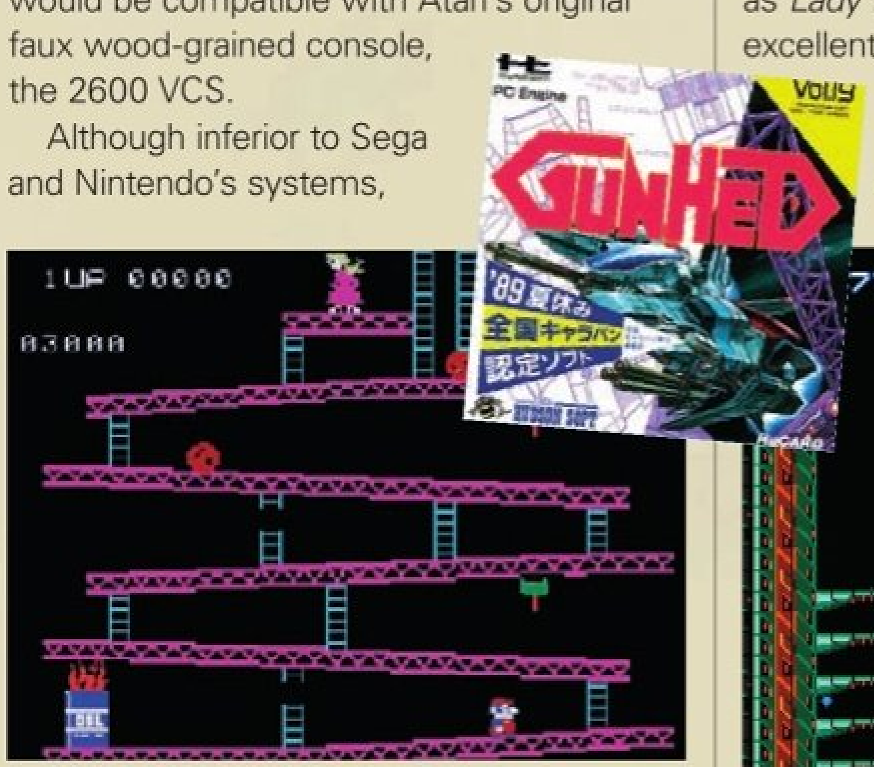
After many a false start itself, Miles Gordon Technology finally presented its long-awaited Spectrum-compatible home micro, the SAM Coupé, at a journalistic gathering. Although not officially available for sale until mid-November, MGT promised that it would have produced 10,000 units for Christmas, although these would only be available direct from the company by mail order for £150.

With new faces trying to scoff a piece of the console gaming pie, an old hand was set to reappear. Atari's 7800 Pro System had just been released in the UK despite having come out in America several years earlier. The ageing system cost £69.95 and would be compatible with Atari's original faux wood-grained console, the 2600 VCS.

Although inferior to Sega and Nintendo's systems, it sold steadily, bolstered by a hankering from gamers for titles high on gameplay rather than bland, unplayable graphical demonstrations. Conversions of coin-ops were developed to add to the extensive 2600 back catalogue, which saw excellent titles such as *Ikari Warriors*, *Commando*, *Xevious* and *Rampage* introduced.

The trend for older games seemed to be growing with news that another archaic console, the CBS ColecoVision, could be ready to stage a revival. Released in 1982, the ColecoVision had some of the best arcade conversions of the time. Such titles as *Lady Bug*, *Mr Do!* and *Zaxxon* were all excellent ports, as was the pack-in game: a superb rendition of *Donkey Kong*.

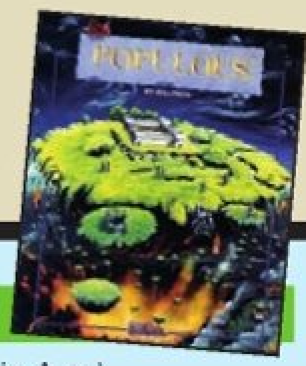
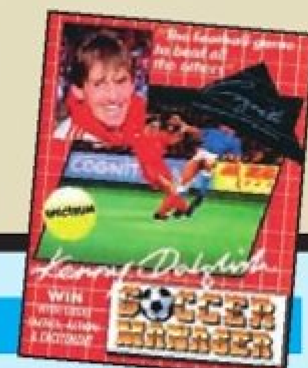
Palan, a company with seemingly plentiful supplies



» [ColecoVision] The archaic console was hoping to make a comeback along with its excellent *Donkey Kong* game.



» [PC Engine] New on import was the shoot-'em-up *Gunhed*.


ATARI ST	
1	Populous (Electronic Arts)
2	RoboCop (Ocean)
3	Forgotten Worlds (US Gold)
4	MicroProse Soccer (MicroProse)
5	Dragon Ninja (Ocean)

SPECTRUM	
1	Kenny Dalglish Soccer Manager (Cognito)
2	Treasure Island Dizzy (Codemasters)
3	RoboCop (Ocean)
4	Running Man (Grandslam)
5	Crazy Cars 2 (Titus)

MUSIC	
1	Ride On Time (Black Box)
2	Right Here Waiting (Richard Marx)
3	Every Day (I Love You More) (Jason Donovan)
4	Swing The Mood (Jive Bunny & The Mastermixers)
5	Sowing The Seeds Of Love (Tear For Fears)

SEPTEMBER 1989 NEWS

22 September saw an IRA-planted bomb explode at the Royal Marines School Of Music in Kent, killing ten teenage bandsman, with another soldier later dying from his injuries. No one was ever convicted of the bombing.

6 September brought a battling 0-0 draw in a World Cup '90 qualifier between Sweden and England. It was just enough for England to qualify for the finals and was epitomised by central defender Terry Butcher, who suffered a deep cut on his head during the match.

Despite having makeshift stitches and bandaging aplenty, the heading duties of defending meant that the wound kept re-opening. Butcher finished the game with his usually white England shirt a distinctly crimson colour and became a bit of a hero in the newspapers, particularly the red tops.


» Meg Ryan runs out of HP Sauce mid-breakfast.

The European premiere of the romantic comedy *When Harry Met Sally*, starring Billy Crystal and Meg Ryan, took place on 4 September. The central question of the movie was whether or not a man and a woman can truly be friends without sex getting in the way. It was best remembered for Meg Ryan faking an orgasm in a diner. Man, those spam fritters must have been good…

15 September saw the UK release of *Lethal Weapon 2*, the sequel to the hit buddy cop movie from 1987, which would again pair Mel Gibson and Danny Glover together. Cue lots of crashes, over-the-top Gibson unhinged craziness, and jumping out of windows.

of the console, planned to introduce the ColecoVision to a new generation of gamers with a price tag of just £50. Despite the competitive price and the promise of cheap games, Palan eventually decided against re-releasing the system into the swiftly changing console gaming marketplace. Shame.

Psygnosis press releases excitedly informed the gaming world that its latest offering, *Shadow Of The Beast*, was almost ready for release on the Amiga. It was a showcase of parallax scrolling, wonderfully crafted graphics and sublime backgrounds. The soundtrack was eerie, atmospheric and outstanding, and the box art was equally terrific, having been created by Roger Dean, fantasy artist extraordinaire. Psygnosis even included a Dean-designed T-shirt in the package, which, incidentally, would cost you just shy of £35.

Considered a classic, it squeezed every last drop of power out of the Amiga but seemed to lack in certain areas; take away the gloss and you found a game that was nothing special in terms of gameplay. It was just another scrolling platform game… and an insanely difficult one at that. Umpteen other conversions followed, including Spectrum, Atari Lynx and PC Engine.

Psygnosis's conversion of the Amiga shoot-'em-up *Blood Money* to the Atari ST was also finished. It continued the theme of being just okay but brick hard.

Activision proudly announced that it had bagged the rights to the newly released James Cameron movie blockbuster, *The Abyss*. The story of a deep-sea drilling team, a stranded nuclear submarine and aliens living in a sub-aquatic universe would have converted into an interesting game. Inexplicably, it was never heard of again.

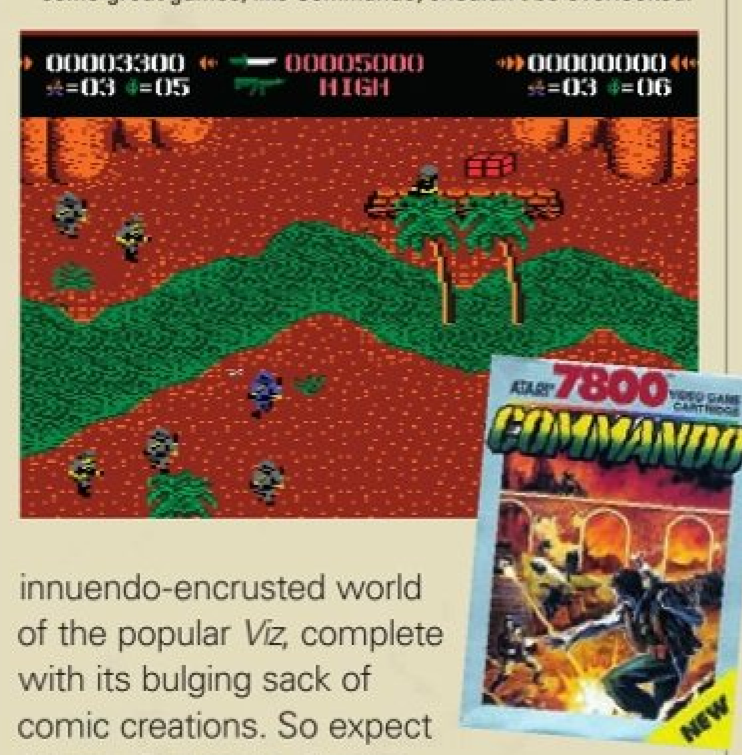
Movie licence hoarder Ocean had some good news for its bank manager, with a press release stating that it had signed a licensing deal, guaranteeing the rights to the new *RoboCop 2* movie. Having had stupendous success with its game based on the first movie, Ocean was presumably rubbing its hands in anticipation.

Virgin Games had also snaffled itself a deal to produce a game based on the

» The release of the Konix Multisystem was almost upon us… and then the rug was pulled away.



» [Atari 7800] Atari's attempt to lure us didn't work, although some great games, like *Commando*, shouldn't be overlooked.



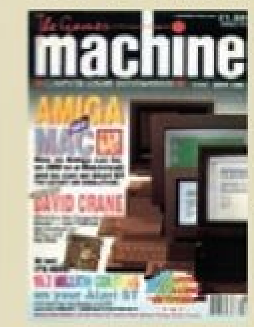
innuendo-encrusted world of the popular *Viz*, complete with its bulging sack of comic creations. So expect Johnny Fartpants, Buster Gonads and the potty-mouthed Roger Mellie guffing and swearing their way onto popular 8- and 16-bit formats. They belatedly did around 1991.

C&VG reviewers gave a hearty back slap to *Strider* (US Gold, Atari ST), *Tusker* (System 3, C64), *Dynamite Dux* (Activision, Atari ST), *Xenon II: Megablast* (Imageworks, Amiga), *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* (US Gold/Lucasfilm, PC), *Mindtrap* (Mastertronic, Spectrum), *Space Quest III* (Activision, Atari ST) and *Rainbow Islands* (Firebird, Atari ST) for being awesome.

An abundance of console reviews this month, particularly on the PC Engine, led to praise for *Pac-Land* (Namcot, PC Engine), *Final Lap Twin* (Namcot, PC Engine), *Ninja Warriors* (HE Systems, PC Engine), *Cyber Cross* (Face, PC Engine), *Thunder Force* (Sega, Mega Drive), *Wonder Boy III* (Sega, Master System) and the magnificent top-down shoot-'em-up *Gunhed* (Hudson Soft, PC Engine).

THIS MONTH IN…

THE GAMES MACHINE



An interview with *Ghostbusters* and *Pitfall* creator David Crane featured with a look at his newest development, *A Boy And His Blob*. The game was completely bonkers… but the good kind of bonkers…



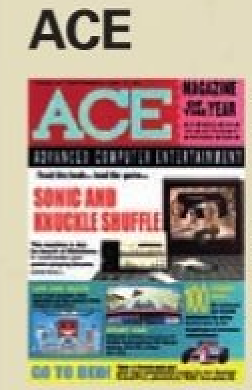
COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES



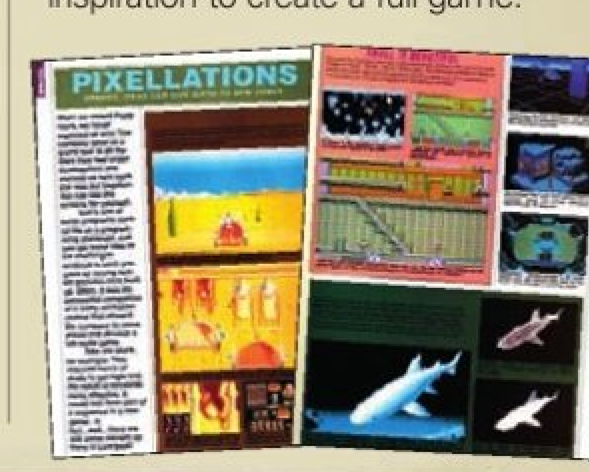
C&VG reviewed the arcade hack-and-slash scrolling beat-'em-up *Golden Axe*. It proved to be an arcade favourite and, unsurprisingly, multiformat conversions soon followed for everything from the Spectrum to the WonderSwan.



ACE



After a recent trip to Psygnosis, *ACE* highlighted how some of its graphical techniques were born from in-house graphical and programming challenges. The results of these challenges frequently led to Psygnosis using the graphics as inspiration to create a full game.



BACK TO THE NINETIES



» [Mega Drive] The original *Sonic 3* was vast enough to be split into two games. *Sonic & Knuckles* was to follow…

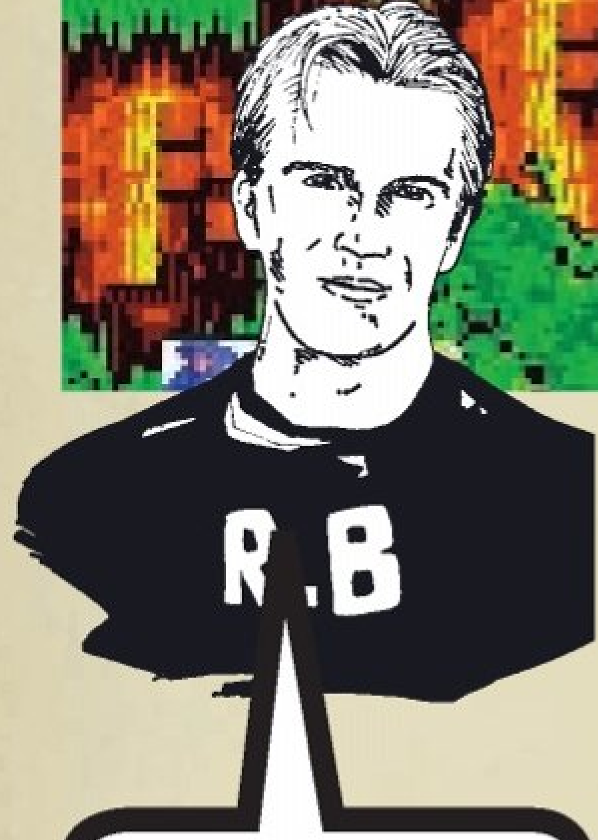
» [SNES] Harder than a diamond-encrusted anvil, the avalanche section was there to infuriate.



» [Mega Drive] Sega's answer to *Street Fighter II* was a cracking fighter with *MK*-style finishers called Overkills.







FEBRUARY 1994 – Sonic 3 arrives, Toads and Dragons team up, Cliffhanger frozen out, Drop Zone drops in while Sega gets Dizzy and a dose of Road Rash. Richard Burton hits an udder at 148mph, creating a milk-based skid mark…

THE LATEST NEWS FROM FEBRUARY 1994

The big news for Sega fans was that Sonic was back for instalment number three. With very little news about it in the press, it came as quite a surprise when press releases revealed that it would be released almost immediately.

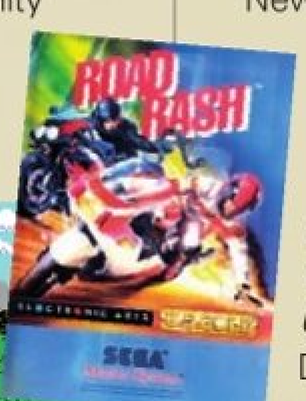
After the recent release of *Sonic CD* on the Mega-CD and the playable but disappointing *Sonic Spinball* off-shoot, it was time for Sega to rejuvenate *Sonic* and inject something fresh into the franchise. The third could survive on the reputation of the first two releases, but Sega would surely be criticised for churning out more of the same…

Sonic 3 was once again a tale of side-scrolling platform action with ring collection, Chaos Emerald hunting and Dr Robotnik avoidance high on its agenda. *Sonic 3* was a lot larger than *Sonic 2*. There were six zones split into two stages, but they were approximately three times larger than those in *Sonic 2*. Starting in Angel Island Zone, you would progress through Hydrocity Zone on to Carnival Night Zone, eventually arriving at the Launch Base Zone. There were also two special stages and the introduction of a new character, Knuckles, the guardian of the Master Emerald, who worked for Robotnik. Tails also returned.

So, was *Sonic 3* varied and different enough to persuade the doubters and hard-nosed reviewers? On the whole, the reception was positive. The originality question was raised many times, but the size of the game and attention to detail won many over.



» [Game Gear] Archer Maclean's classic *Dropzone* is back and as good as it ever was.





» [Game Gear] Wrapping a length of chain around someone's head while racing on motorbikes. What's not to like?

Sega also revealed that the next game would be called *Sonic & Knuckles*. The company explained that *Sonic 3* and *Sonic & Knuckles* were originally intended to be one huge single-cartridge release, but time constraints and spiralling cartridge costs meant the game was split into two. Although playable as a standalone game, *Sonic & Knuckles* could be used as an expansion pack, allowing *Sonic 3* and other games to be plugged in, opening up a host of new and special features. It was expected to appear in around six months. Just long enough for *Sonic 3* to have a good sales run…

New out this month from Rare was a strange concoction of a great scrolling beat-'em-up and a reasonable side-scrolling platform game blended together to make one big scrolling disappointment: *Battletoads & Double Dragon: The Ultimate Team*. The SNES and Mega Drive game would see Rare's toads and Technos' Lee brothers team up in a multi-level extravaganza of mediocrity.

The novelty factor of two different franchises coming together was probably the only selling point to the game as, for some, it was a tired, wearisome affair. Graphically okay, the gameplay involved you walking a bit, punching a bit and then walking some more. If you were lucky

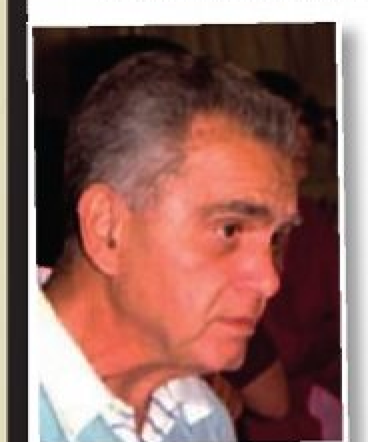
FEBRUARY 1994 NEWS



» Seemingly a favourite for art thieves, it's fortunate that there are four versions of *The Scream*.

On 12 February one of the world's most iconic paintings, *The Scream* by Edvard Munch, was stolen from the National Gallery in Olso. Two men took just 50 seconds to break through a window, cut the painting from the wall and escape. The picture had been moved from the high-security upper floor for an exhibition and was reportedly uninsured.

The Scream was thought to be too well-known to be sold on. However, the following month a ransom demand of $1 million was received but refused. The painting was recovered in May and four men were arrested.



» Jack Kirby – creator of the original X-Men, the Fantastic Four and recent cinema offering, Thor.

On the same day and still in Norway was the opening ceremony of the 17th Winter Olympics. It was held in and around Lillehammer and ran until 27 February. Great Britain once again triumphed spectacularly with two bronze medals.

4 February saw the premiere of *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* starring Jim Carrey. 1994 turned out to be a fantastic year for Carrey, with *The Mask* and *Dumb And Dumber* also being released.

On 6 February Jack Kirby, one of the most influential comic artists and writers ever, died at the age of 76. Among his creations for Marvel were Iron Man, Thor, Hulk, X-Men, Silver Surfer, Fantastic Four and Captain America. Simply put, he *was* comics.

enough to stay awake to meet an end-of-level boss, you would even get to do some jumping around.

Cliffhanger, the Sylvester Stallone snowy action movie, had been licensed, with Sony Imagesoft releasing Mega Drive, Mega-CD and SNES versions this month. With yet more side-scrolling fighting and the occasional avalanche dodge, the source material would surely conjure up some interesting gaming. Unfortunately not…

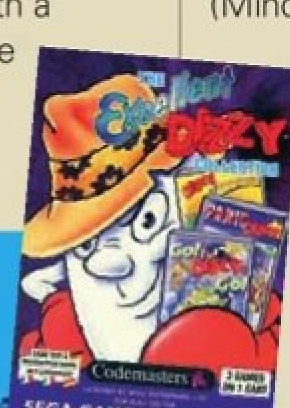
The gameplay suffered chronically, with lackadaisical hit detection in fights and a completely unforgiving avalanche section. While the fighting sections were a breeze, the avalanche, which had you running on the SNES and Mega Drive and snowboarding on the Mega-CD, caused terminal loss of life and blood-curdling frustration on a par with a *Jet Set Willy* infinite life death fall. The lack of a save game option was the icing on the turd.

Codemasters had news of an Archer Maclean classic being converted to the Sega Game Gear and Master System. Having enjoyed a second wind with a successful conversion to the Game Boy two years ago, *Drop Zone*, the old-school *Defender* clone, was nearing completion for the two Sega systems. The Game Gear version was a very competent rendition and played well. The Master System version looked great in previews but sadly was never released.

Codemasters had another retro release due out for the Game Gear with the debut of *The Excellent Dizzy Collection*. A compilation of three games featuring the egg-shaped hero – *Dizzy The Adventurer*, *Panic Dizzy* and the previously unreleased *Go Dizzy Go!* – the collection would be suitably released around Easter time.

In what was a purple patch for Game Gear and Master System gamers, US Gold revealed that *Road Rash* would be released imminently. It would convert well to both systems, allowing for some great crowbar-on-forehead action during the racing while you avoid the fuzz and assorted stray cattle.

The *Amiga Force* reviewing team thought that *The Settlers* (Blue Byte), *Cool Spot* (Virgin Games), *Goblins 3* (Sierra), *Zool 2* (Gremlin Graphics), *Cosmic Spacehead* (Codemasters), *Fury Of The Furries* (Mindscape), *Lords Of Chaos* (Buzz) and *Black Crypt* (Hit Squad) were worthy of your hard-earned cash.



Over at *Mean Machines Sega*, they were going bonkers for *Eternal Champions* (Sega, Mega Drive) and *The Secret Of Monkey Island* (Lucasfilm, Mega-CD). Other high-ranking games reviewed this month included *Chuck Rock 2: Son Of Chuck* (Core Design, Mega-CD) and *Castlevania: The New Generation* (Konami, Mega Drive).

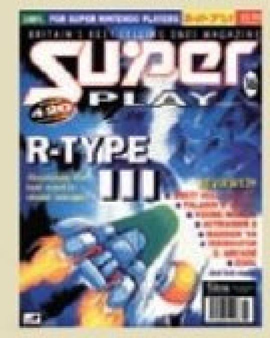
Conversely, *SNES Force* barely had anything scoring highly. The highlight was *Secret Of Mana* (Squaresoft, SNES), and *Madden NFL' 94* (Electronic Arts, SNES) and *ActRaiser 2* (Enix) were best of the rest.



» [Game Gear] *Dizzy The Adventurer* was actually an enhanced version of *Dizzy: Prince Of The Yolkfolk*.

THIS MONTH IN…

SUPER PLAY



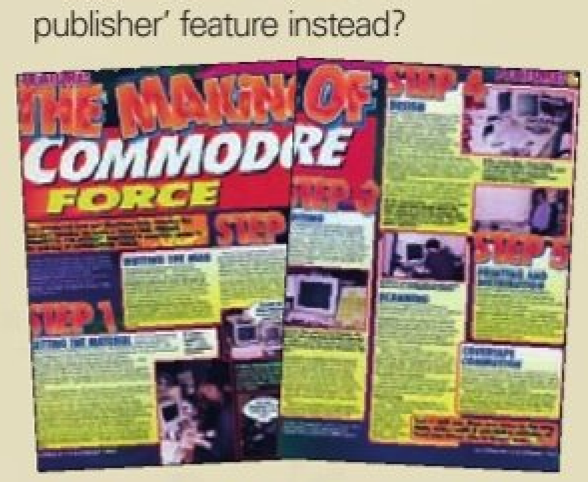
Obscure interview of the month was with an account director at the ad agency tasked with creating a campaign for Nintendo games. He explained who the target audience was and the processes in creating the ads. Rik Mayall starred in the set of nine commercials.



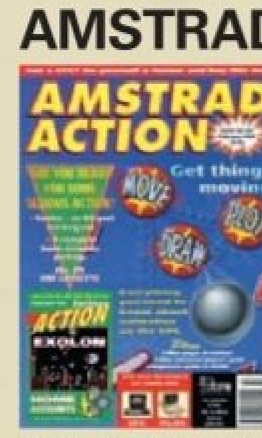
COMMODORE FORCE



Issue 105 of *Commodore Force*, the magazine formerly known as *Zzap!*, ran with a detailed feature on how the magazine was created. Ironically, one issue later, *CF* would be no more. Maybe they should have gone with a 'how to liquidate a magazine and its publisher' feature instead?



AMSTRAD ACTION



The faithful old CPC magazine took a look at platform games by selecting three that were subtitled "the good, the bad and the ugly". The good was *Prehistorik 2* (Titus), the bad was *Count Duckula* (Alternative) and the ugly was *Quartet* (Activision).



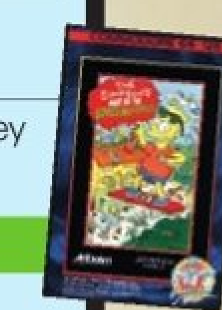
CHARTS

FEB 1994



AMIGA

1. Frontier: Elite 2 (Gametek)
2. Premier Manager 2 (Gremlin Graphics)
3. Championship Manager (Domark)
4. Cannon Fodder (Virgin Games)
5. The Secret Of Monkey Island (Kixx XL)



COMMODORE 64

1. The Simpsons: Bart vs The Space Mutants (Hit Squad)
2. Creatures (Kixx)
3. Rainbow Islands (Hit Squad)
4. Terminator 2 (Hit Squad)
5. Street Fighter (Kixx)



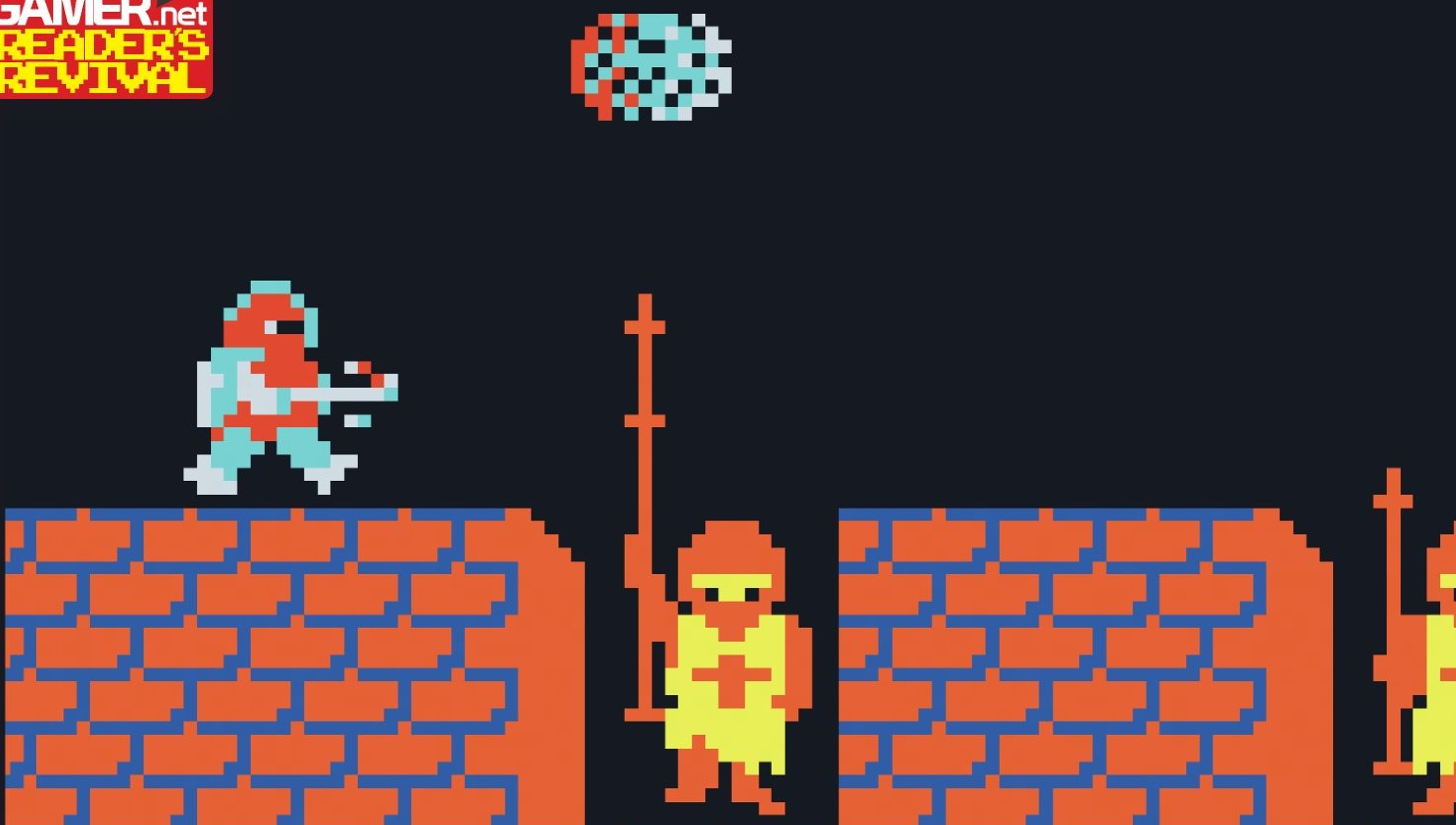
SNES

1. Super Mario All-Stars (Nintendo)
2. Street Fighter II Turbo (Capcom)
3. Jurassic Park (Ocean)
4. Nigel Mansell's World Championship (Nintendo)
5. Aladdin (Capcom)

MUSIC

1. Without You (Mariah Carey)
2. Things Can Only Get Better (D:Ream)
3. Breathe Again (Toni Braxton)
4. Return To Innocence (Enigma)
5. The Power Of Love (Celine Dion)





Hunchback

THE PRINCE OF THIEVES GETS THE HUMP

#39



» ARCADE
» CENTURY ELECTRONICS
» 1983

While most people will remember the home ports for Spectrum, CPC and BBC Micro, *Hunchback* was originally released in arcades by Century Electronics in 1983. The game was a relatively simple *Pitfall*-style platformer, with multiple left-to-right flip-screens, each featuring challenges to overcome in order for Quasimodo to rescue Esmerelda.

The origins of *Hunchback* are, however, more interesting, given that the original theme of the game was apparently nothing to do with the famous Victor Hugo novel. As the story goes, the original artist had penned a fairly lumpy version of Robin Hood that appeared to look more like a Hunchback. After the artist left the company, it was decided to rename the game to fit the rendition of the main character. Looking back at *Hunchback* with this in mind, it does appear to fit based on the available clues:

1) Liberal use of arrows in the game as hazards, and the bright green costume – very Robin Hood.
2) The bolted-on bells, and the castle rampats that look out of place for Notre Dame Cathedral.
3) The soldiers are dressed as crusaders, as featured in Robin Hood, from a war that ended in 1291 (the Victor Hugo book is set in 1482).

This does not detract from a great game that captured the public's imagination. The game was tricky, with increasing levels of challenge, most reliant on perfectly timed jumps across ramparts, catching ropes, and avoiding flaming pits and arrows. Faster completion times awarded bonuses, with five screens cleared in a row without loss of life awarding a Super Bonus. When you reach the end, you rescue Esmerelda, and the game starts again, only faster.

I had fond memories of this game, starting at the end of Southend Pier in the early Eighties, and continuing through Spectrum and BBC versions which I owned. Only 20 years later did I discover the games's strange provenance, and the alleged links to a Robin Hood game that never was.

RETROBATE PROFILE

- » **NAME:** ALEX REEVES
- » **JOINED:** 10TH AUGUST 2008
- » **LOCATION:** ESSEX
- » **OCCUPATION:** SOFTWARE
- » **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** SPECTRUM





SONIC BOOM:
The 20-Year Success Story Of Sonic The Hedgehog

Celebrating his 20th anniversary the day this very issue of Retro Gamer goes on sale, Sonic the Hedgehog has had a long life of ups and downs. Here we chart the Blue Blur's story so far and talk to many of the designers charged with keeping the hedgehog spinning



Is it possible to write a history of Sonic without mentioning Mario? In theory, but you'd be foolish to try. Though created a decade later, Sonic's existence hinges on that of Mario, and the two have been rivals ever since. Sonic's history is therefore also Mario's, and even platform games as a whole.

The sheer brilliance of *Super Mario Bros* put a Nintendo Entertainment System into more than 60 million homes worldwide, while Sega's 8-bit equivalent, the Master System, had to make do with just 13 million. There are several reasons for this disparity, of course, but Mario was one of the biggest reasons and Sega knew it. Launching its 16-bit system, the Mega Drive, in 1988, Sega had a two-year head start on the Super Famicom/ SNES, but even with such an advantage it struggled to keep up with the ageing NES.

Sega's expertise, right through the Eighties and beyond, focused on its coin-op games. This was where Sega ruled videogames, its comfort zone, and the company certainly managed to attract a sizeable fan base just by being able to convert its greatest hits to the home. But the tastes of console gamers gradually shifted throughout the mid to late Eighties. NES games like *Super Mario Bros*, *The Legend Of Zelda*, *Mega Man*, *Castlevania* and *Final Fantasy* represented a shift away from the instant gratification of the arcades and towards a more protracted experience that gamers could spend hours, days and weeks absorbed in.

Sega remained extremely successful in the arcades, of course, so its home conversions also remained a core part of its business, especially since they were relatively cheap to produce and sold in large enough numbers. But the Master System and Mega Drive needed original games, unconnected to the coin-ops. These came slowly but surely. Games like *Phantasy Star* and *Streets Of Rage* were great console exclusives that represented a step in the right direction, and Sega even published some wonderful platform games in the shape of *Psycho Fox* and *Alex Kidd*, but these did little to slow *Mario*'s astronomical rise in popularity. By 1990 there had been four incredible *Mario* platform games, each one somehow more ingenious than the last, to the point where for many people Mario and videogames were one and the same thing. Sega still needed its Mario.

Perhaps it's a sign of how things had changed by the Nineties, or maybe it shows just how different Sega and Nintendo really were, but Sonic's origins were actually very different to those of Mario. The latter was famously created out of necessity. The limitations of 1981's visual technology meant that it was difficult to even create a character that could be recognised as a person, so Mario became a short, fat plumber with a moustache not because Shigeru Miyamoto had any urge to tell a story about a man in dungarees but because that was all the technology would allow. By 1991, however, technology had progressed to the point where just about any character could be represented on screen, so instead of creating a character out of blocks on graph paper with a particular type of game in mind, Sega simply started with paper and the desire to make a character of any kind.

Developer Quotes

"I have great memories of *Sonic*. In fact, it provided a ton of inspiration for a game Team17 developed in the early Nineties (*Superfrog*) and I guess a host of others too. The speed of the game, along with great vibrant art was a real head-turner at the time. It's a powerful series that's had a rollercoaster ride the last few years but I would like to hope it's getting back to where it was. I much prefer the 2D playfields."

Martyn Brown, co-founder of Team 17

In what is now a part of the company's legend, Sega set several of its best designers to work, challenging them to create a new character that could become a new type of hero for Sega and a true rival to Mario. Several characters were created as a result of this exercise, many of which were used in later games, but the winner was a little blue hedgehog, drawn by Naoto Oshima, one of the designers on the first two *Phantasy Star* games.

Originally named Mr Needlemouse, Oshima's hedgehog was coloured the same blue as the Sega logo, which only seemed appropriate since the character was designed to be the company's new mascot.

Designed primarily to appeal to an American audience, he also featured the colours white and red, though Oshima puts this down to coincidence, citing Santa Claus's colour scheme and the belt across Michael Jackson's jacket on the cover to *Bad* as the inspiration for Sonic's shoes. Finally, Oshima wanted to imbue his character with a 'can do' attitude, inspired by television footage of the then Arkansas governor Bill Clinton. In the original design, Sonic also had fangs and played in a rock band, but these elements were removed under the advice of Sega America's Madeline Schroeder.

Sonic's friendly but cool character design was certainly effective, but nobody ever played *Super Mario Bros* because they liked the character. At least we hope they didn't. Sonic needed the best kind of platform game, and he got one from Yuji

"Everything about Sonic The Hedgehog was designed to make the game play quickly, keep momentum up, keep moving at top speed"

Developer Quotes

"I remember seeing *Sonic* at an early trade show in the US. It was January 1991 at CES Las Vegas. It was a single level and fairly low profile on Sega's booth – just one or two discreet screens. The Genesis had been launched in the US six months before.

"Six months later at the summer CES in Chicago, Sega went into overdrive promoting *Sonic*. It stole the show. Back then all videogames were slow, so this was revolutionary and eye-catching! Sega set out to use *Sonic* to demonstrate the speed of their new console, and they pulled it off fantastically!"

Philip Oliver, CEO & co-founder of Blitz Games Studios



Must-Have Merchandise

There's been an unquantifiable amount of Sonic merchandise produced in the past 20 years. Here's our pick of some of the most interesting examples

1. BOARD GAME
MB Games licensed tons of videogame properties for its board game business in the Eighties and Nineties. The *Sonic* one is typical of the line, vaguely translating the videogame experience into a fun but uncomplicated board game.



2. STYLUS
Released as a pre-order incentive for DS RPG *Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood*, this collection of three styluses allows you to decorate your DS with Sonic, Knuckles and… uh… someone we don't recognise.



3. SONIC RACING SYSTEM
Being focused on speed, Sonic has appeared in a bunch of racing games, both video and physical. This one is a lot like Scalextric, only with a hedgehog and a fox instead of cars.



4. PAPERCRAFT
Created by Sega to celebrate Sonic's 15th anniversary in 2006, this model re-creates Green Hill Zone in colourful, papery style. Get it from: **sonic.sega.jp/SonicChannel/enjoy/papercraft/index.html**



5. CONFUSING BACKPACK
You might have a hard time finding this bootleg backpack out in the wild but it's sure worth the effort. Just look at how many confusing, incongruous elements it packs into a single item.





Naka and Hirokazu Yasuhara, Sega programmer and game designer respectively, who joined with Oshima to form Sonic Team and develop *Sonic The Hedgehog.*

Yuji Naka was practically legendary at Sega for his incredible programming ability, and his influence over *Sonic The Hedgehog* cannot be overstated. Naka was a great fan of *Super Mario Bros* but wanted to play something much faster, so that was the direction that the project went



in. Everything about it was designed to make the game play quickly – quite ironic given the slow speed of hedgehogs. There are the loop-the-loops and the springs, all good for keeping momentum up, and the gameplay flowing from left to right, while Sonic's ability to curl into a spiky ball mid-jump allowed him to hit an enemy, eliminate it, and then keep moving at top speed.

The resulting game was pure Sega. Almost blinding in its use of colour, thrilling to play and totally unwilling to take itself too seriously, it was a true pleasure that effortlessly appealed to anyone who tried it and had a very likeable character as its star. Tyler Sigman, lead designer on 2006's *Sonic Rivals*, recalls: "I played the original *Sonic* on Genesis when I was a teenager, and like most people, I loved it! The speed, graphics and character were great. Like *Mario* and *Mega Man*, *Sonic* was really memorable platforming. It seems such a small thing now, but Sonic's attitude really did stand out from a lot of other characters at the time," he says, citing the way Sonic would impatiently tap his feet when left alone as an example of the hedgehog's cool factor.

Christian Senn, director of the cancelled *Sonic X-Treme*, is also a fan of Sonic's famous attitude but takes the time to praise the exciting, kinetic gameplay of the original game. "I liked Sonic's look, his attitude, and the way it felt to zoom around the playfields," he says. "I liked the look and functionality of the enemies, the fact

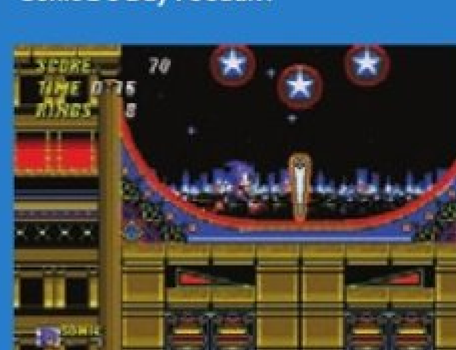
Sonic Timeline

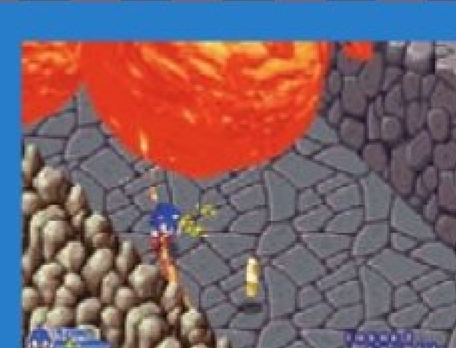
A quick guide to Sonic's most memorable games… and a few others



Sonic The Hedgehog
Multi | 1991
One year after the competition to find a Sega figurehead, Sonic's first outing was unveiled. Created by Yuji Naka, *Sonic The Hedgehog*'s mixture of speed and graphical finesse helped to establish the Mega Drive as a serious contender in the hearts of gamers the world over.

Sonic The Hedgehog 2
Multi | 1992
This time, players found themselves immersed in a game that had been improved in every conceivable way. It was also the first console game to have a worldwide launch when Tuesday 24 November 1992 became known as '*Sonic 2*'s Day'. Geddit?





SEGASonic The Hedgehog
Arcade | 1993
With the home market stitched up, Sega decided to try its hand in the arcades. Trackballs at the ready and two new characters to play with failed to inspire much interest. Poor distribution and the fact that the game deviated from the normal gameplay didn't help either.

Sonic CD
Mega-CD | 1993
New hardware meant that there really was only one character to sell it to the masses. Basically, this was *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* with a time travel element. For what it's worth, the game did try to make use of the CD-ROM, with much-improved animation and sound.





Sonic Chaos
Game Gear | 1993
Handheld gamers rejoiced at the knowledge that Sonic was back on the Game Gear. This time you could play through the game as Tails, who had been absent from previous Game Gear outings, as the game revealed more fully what the handheld was capable of.

"Following directly behind Sonic at all times, Tails' ginger blur added a nice visual flourish to the game's colourful rollercoaster ride"

that they provided some challenge and offered a break from the rush of speed. I think what I enjoyed most of all about the game was the balance between puzzles, speed, combat and collection. The physics and feeling of interaction really felt great."

The game and its star became synonymous with Sega and helped propel the Mega Drive to sales of around 40 million, only 9 million short of the SNES – a minuscule gap compared to the 47 million that separated the Master System and NES. *Sonic The Hedgehog* was so popular that it inevitably became a huge brand for Sega, starting, of course, with sequels. Four such sequels followed on the Mega Drive and Mega-CD alone, not to mention all the spin-off games and Master System and Game Gear exclusives that also appeared in the same period. Aside from some tiny proportional changes, Sonic's appearance remained the same in the sequels. And why wouldn't it? Sega pretty much got the design spot-on from the beginning. Plus, the company's artists probably had their hands busy designing the multitude of new characters that the publisher somehow seemed to think were so necessary.

Tails wasn't so bad, admittedly. In fact, his inclusion in *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* is one of the single most underrated features of the series. Following directly behind Sonic at all times, his ginger blur added a nice visual flourish to the game's colourful rollercoaster ride. And then there's the fact that a second player could plug in their own pad and take control of Tails, happily jumping around behind Sonic and helping out with enemies, but without the risk of failure. It's the sort of feature that games all too rarely employ, allowing a younger or less skilled player to join in and have fun without any frustration, and it's something that the *Mario* series has only recently begun to experiment with in *Super Mario Galaxy*'s co-star mode.

Sadly the same can't be said for the other characters introduced through *Sonic*'s early years. The likes of Knuckles and Amy Rose signified the start of a worrying trend toward unnecessary, annoying new characters that would only get worse as the years went by. Though the early to mid Nineties certainly has its fair share of terrible sidekicks. Anyone remember Mighty the Armadillo, Espio the Chameleon or – ahem – Nack the Weasel? No, thought not. Despite the invasion of the world's most annoying characters, *Sonic 2* and *3*, *Sonic & Knuckles* and *Sonic CD* all proved to be brilliant platform games and all played their part in catapulting Sega's little blue hedgehog into popular culture as a whole. Countless merchandise tie-ins



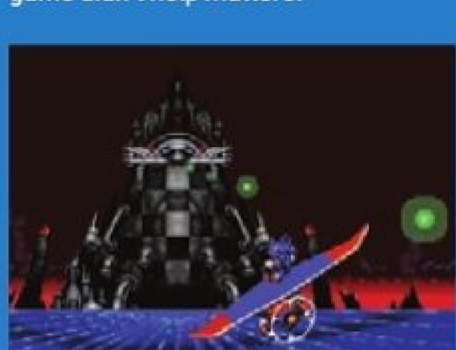
» [Mega Drive] *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* introduced Tails, who was fine on his own but started a worrying trend.

Developer Quotes

"Like a *Super Mario* game on steroids, *Sonic* was a wonderwall of hyperkinetic play for the ADHD generation. The feeling was supersonic… sans gin and tonic!"

Eugene Jarvis, creator of Robotron: 2084 and Defender

Sonic Spinball
Multi | 1993
As popular as Sonic was, *Sonic Spinball* was an attempt to cash in yet further on the blue speedy one. Once again, deviating from what gamers expected proved its undoing, and the fact that this was a deeply average game didn't help matters.





Sonic Drift
Game Gear | 1994
What Game Gear fans needed was a *Mario Kart* game, or so Sega decided. A *Mario Kart*-style racer would have been ideal. However, what Japanese gamers got was a slow, dull and uninspired racing game that was never released outside Japan, thankfully.

Sonic The Hedgehog 3
Mega Drive | 1994
A return to form for Sonic with this very impressive outing that not only looked beautiful but also added a greater depth of gameplay than had been seen previously. Of special note is that this is the first *Sonic* game to feature a save feature, thanks to the built-in battery.





Sonic & Knuckles
Mega Drive | 1994
Picking up where *Sonic 3* left off, this is more of the same great gameplay lifted from its predecessor. However, thanks to the use of Sega's lock-on technology, further gaming bonuses could be attained by simply connecting the cart to other *Sonic* games. Genius.

Sonic Triple Trouble
Game Gear | 1994
After a glut of ill-conceived Game Gear outings, the ickle Sonic was back on form and back to doing what he and Tails did best – collecting rings, emeralds and racing through bonus stages. As Game Gear *Sonic* games go, this was mightily impressive.



followed, including a total of four different animated TV series, a movie and enough comic books to destroy an entire rainforest. And there were more games too, Sonic proving so popular that Sega felt it could drop him into any old game to boost sales. Which, to be honest, it was right about. Throughout the early Nineties, *Sonic* characters starred in a *Puyo Puyo* clone, a pinball game, two kart racers and a couple of isometric platformers too, all of them very successful. Sega had clearly got the Mario equivalent it was looking for.

As Sega transitioned from the Mega Drive to the Saturn, it only seemed inevitable that Sonic would make the leap too, but, for a multitude of reasons, it never really happened. He certainly put in his fair share of appearances, though. There was the not really 3D at all *Sonic 3D*, the actually quite brilliant retro compilation *Sonic Jam*, and the technically impressive racing game *Sonic R*. But no proper platform game. Sonic Team chose to spend the Saturn era developing original ideas like *NiGHTS Into Dreams* and *Burning Rangers* instead – for which we're very thankful, of course – while the US-based Sega Technical Institute was charged with developing a full 3D update of the series in the form of *Sonic X-Treme*, which sadly failed to reach completion.

Developer Quotes

"Sega knew they needed a character of their own that could match up with Mario, but that is easier said than done. They set an ambitious goal and managed to pull it off in a compelling and unique way."

Trip Hawkins, founder of Electronic Arts and 3DO

Christian Senn recalls the process of trying to rework the character of Sonic into three dimensions. "I wanted to maintain the look and feel of the 2D Sonic from *Sonic 3* for *Sonic X-Treme*," he says. "In addition to the game graphics, the original sketches of Sonic by Naoto Oshima were wonderful and I was drawn to them as inspiration for *X-Treme*. I discussed a desire to maintain the integrity of the original 2D art style with lead artist Ross Harris, who subsequently did a brilliant job of bringing Sonic to life in 3D. We had not yet seen any representations of Sonic in 3D, so it was very exciting to pave new ground. We wanted to continue the quality and polish that our predecessors had achieved, so attention to the big picture and the details was essential."

Translating the gameplay into 3D was less easy, however, and may be the key to the reason why the troubled *Sonic X-Treme* was never completed. "I desired to take the aforementioned balance of *Sonic The Hedgehog* and translate it into 3D," says Senn. "Not having any idea of how large a bite we were trying to chew, the intention was to combine speed, puzzle-solving, ring-collection, bonus rounds, special rounds, enemies, bosses and some new gameplay elements nobody had every seen before. One of the hallmarks of the successive 2D *Sonic* titles was to introduce something new every game. We were trying to create all of the original elements for the first time in a whole new dimension, and even add more. In hindsight, it might have been wise to attempt to re-create the basic elements of the 2D games in 3D, which might have allowed us time to polish the game before finishing and releasing it."

"The key thing I remember Sega always pushing for was to 'make Sonic move faster'. Getting the feeling of speed was a real challenge"

Jon Burton, founder and director of Traveller's Tales, had more success than Senn, creating and finishing two *Sonic* games, *Sonic 3D* and *Sonic R*, for the Saturn, though neither of them could really be classed as proper *Sonic* platform games. "The key thing I remember Sega always pushing for was to 'make Sonic move faster'," says Burton. "In *Sonic 3D*, getting the feeling of speed was a



» [Mega Drive] *Sonic 3* was so big and ambitious that it was split in half, with the rest of it going into *Sonic & Knuckles*.



Sonic Timeline

A quick guide to Sonic's most memorable games… and a few others



Sonic Drift 2
Game Gear | 1995

Compared to the original, *Sonic Drift 2* was a much more considered sequel. This time the game delivered a better Grand Prix mode, banked curves, hills and the all-important link-up mode. Not the class act that *Mario Kart* proved to be, but a worthy attempt nonetheless.

Sonic Labyrinth
Game Gear | 1995

Sega continued to treat Game Gear owners to more variants. This time it decided that a puzzle game in the style of *Marble Madness* was the order of the day. However, the time limits and puzzle elements brought down what may have been a half-decent game.





Sonic The Fighters
Arcade | 1996

It had been three years since the last *Sonic* outing at the arcades, so it must have seemed prudent to have another stab at the coin-op fans. Unfortunately, because it was aimed at kids, it lacked depth and ultimately proved to be an unrewarding experience.

Sonic 3D
Multi | 1996

New console, new *Sonic* game. Well, kind of… This was pretty much the same game that would appear on the Mega Drive but with added 3D tunnels. However, at the time it impressed gamers and gave them an indication of what the Saturn was capable of.





Sonic Jam
Saturn | 1997

This had nothing to do with fruit, but from Sega's point of view it wasn't a bad ploy to get some money from Saturn owners who missed out on the Mega Drive games. Aside from the omission of *Sonic CD*, this was the perfect way to enjoy classic *Sonic* action.

Toon Struck

Robby London was head of creative affairs at DIC, the animation studio behind scores of popular children's cartoons between 1980 and 2008, including three different Sonic The Hedgehog series. Here he tells us what it was like to work with Sega's most famous face

Retro Gamer: What was your first experience of *Sonic The Hedgehog* and what did you think?

Robby London: We knew just from its trending popularity at the time that we wanted to pitch Sega of America on the idea of developing *Sonic* into an animated series for television, and so we needed to bone up on the property. Since I am not a gamer, we got one of the DIC artists who was a *Sonic* aficionado to play it for a video capture. So I was introduced to it by watching a video of the game being played. I recall thinking it had a very charismatic lead character and an interesting look. Of course, I couldn't make too much sense of the story elements, but then in those days it was quite typical for the lore behind most games to be elusive and impenetrable.

RG: What instructions did Sega give you in terms of what you could or couldn't do with the character?

RL: I don't remember any specific upfront instructions per se, other than emphasising to us how crucially important and valuable Sonic was to them. Which, of course, we knew! Sega did retain a contractual approval right for everything we did. So when we'd submit something like a character design, they would often have comments or requests for revisions, mostly on specific details of the designs, and mostly to ensure there was conformity across all the *Sonic* products they were licensing. They also had approval rights on all the voices, music, individual scripts for the episodes and various other creative elements. While they gave notes and requested revisions from time to time, I can't remember any specific theme to their comments nor any generic instructions. They had a representative named Jane Thompson who spent a lot of time with us in LA. Because she was professional and knowledgeable about production, that turned out to be exceedingly helpful.

RG: What do you think are the important characteristics of Sonic and how are these captured in a cartoon rather than a game?

RL: Mostly, I think it's attitude. Even Sega's original design of the character conveyed a lot of 'tude; cockiness, perseverance and a sort of a devil-be-damned outlook. Traits such as these lend themselves really well to an animated character for a television cartoon and can be significantly enhanced in that medium. Those of us who were writers created a lore and a context and situations for Sonic to demonstrate this persona with a richness that was not possible in the game. We came up with the phrase 'fastest thing alive', the signature arms-crossed, impatient foot-tapping pose, along with the catchphrase: 'I'm waiiiiting.' We also gave the character an actual voice, in this case Jaleel White, a huge TV star in America at the time for his role as Steve Urkel [in sitcom *Family Matters*]. Writers created the lines and the personality and Jaleel helped bring it to life. And in those days, even the animation itself that was possible in television far surpassed the limitations of videogames of the time.

real challenge. We had an upper limit on how fast we could physically scroll the screen, so Sonic could never move as fast as we wanted him to. Having the boost pads and bumpers helped, but he definitely moved slower in *Sonic 3D* than any other *Sonic* game. In *Sonic R*, the whole point of the game was racing, so the feeling of speed could really be focused on. In that game, the rings were very important as they would open up boost gates and secret short cuts, so the rings were used like a currency to 'buy' short cuts for better lap times."

The Saturn had some incredible games, of course, but if ever a console needed its star attraction it was this one. Up against the spectacularly popular PlayStation, the Saturn really needed every advantage it could get, and particularly after the world-changing brilliance of *Super Mario 64*, everyone expected *Sonic* to make the transition from pixels to polygons in style. It never really happened on the Saturn, but *Sonic* did eventually go 3D in the following generation, and Sega wasted virtually no time getting the game out there, launching *Sonic*

Developer Quotes

"Growing up, I was a hardcore Nintendo fanboy. The Genesis changed all that and made me an overall videogame fan instead of a one-console fanboy, which is a really silly way to be, but that's another article. I loved character platformers, so when *Sonic* came around with that crazy blast processing and insane speeds I was hooked. Loved the look, style and play, and it had a huge influence over my first commercial success – *Jazz Jackrabbit*!"

Cliff Bleszinski, creator of Jazz Jackrabbit

Sonic R
Saturn | 1997

A cracking Saturn game and one that succeeded because it offered something different. *Sonic R* was a 3D racer that pitted familiar characters against one another. Oddly enough, this wasn't developed by Sonic Team but rather by British developer Traveller's Tales.





Sonic Adventure
Dreamcast | 1999

After the demise of the Saturn, Sonic returned faster and sleeker than ever. Determined to make the Dreamcast a success, Sonic Team did everything to ensure that *Sonic Adventure* was a big adventure that ably demonstrated the technical proficiency of the new console.

Sonic Pocket Adventure
Neo Geo Pocket Color | 1999

'Anything but the GBC' must have been the cry at Sega when it decided to make another portable edition. Taking elements from *Sonic 2* and *3* as well as bolting on a link-up option where you could race against your friends once again showed the prowess of Sega.





Sonic Shuffle
Dreamcast | 2000

Hot on the heels of *Sonic Adventure* came *Sonic Shuffle*, a collection of puzzle games not unlike *Mario Party*, which must have partly inspired Sega's stab at the genre. It was a fairly dire experience but it was capped off with some lovely cel-shaded graphics.

Sonic Adventure 2
Dreamcast | 2001

By now the Dreamcast was all but gone, but it didn't stop Sonic Team releasing one last *Sonic* game on a Sega console – it was Sonic's tenth anniversary and it would have seemed rude not to. However, this wasn't the last we'd see of the Blue Blur…



The Special Stages

One of the most memorable parts of the early Sonic games are the hidden stages that featured completely different gameplay to the main adventures



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
The original special stage isn't exactly the best, but it is still fun. In it you control a curled-up Sonic as he bounces around a rotating maze, trying to get to the Chaos Emerald in the centre while avoiding the exits. The same special stage also appeared in *Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode I*.



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2
Definitely the most popular special stage of them all, this one saw Sonic and Tails running straight down the screen along a half-pipe, collecting rings and avoiding bombs. It was a technical marvel at the time, creating a sense of 3D depth that was rare on the Mega Drive.



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 3
Continuing the trend of 3D bonus stages, *Sonic 3*'s effort asked you to run around a globe and walk over the top of coloured balls in order to change them from blue to red. Hit a red ball, however, and Sonic would bounce off, often straight into trouble. This stage was also in *Sonic & Knuckles*.



SONIC CD
Making great use of the Mega-CD's sprite-scaling abilities, *Sonic CD*'s special stage was basically a 3D open world in which Sonic could run in any direction, in order to hunt down and destroy robots. Another technical marvel, this was just one of many things that made *Sonic CD* special.



SONIC 3D
The Saturn version of *Sonic 3D* featured a special stage that was very similar to *Sonic 2*'s, but the Mega Drive edition was more original, using sprite rotation to create platforms for Sonic to use to reach the end. Though they looked great, these stages suffered from some unfortunate pop-up.

Developer Quotes

"I first saw it when shown to me by a journo mate – same guy who brought me a NES and *Super Mario* one weekend, which really was a life-changing event. I remember being impressed by the bright colours and the speed. It seemed ridiculously fast, especially compared to *Mario*. It was obviously Sega's reply to Mario, attempting to establish a similarly iconic main character with an excellent platform game. I liked that they didn't try simply to ape *Mario*, but distinguished *Sonic* with detailed environments, big areas and the speed. *Sonic 2* remains my favourite, though!"

Jeff Minter, developer of Tempest 2000

Adventure alongside the Dreamcast in America and Europe.

Sonic Adventure was a bold new direction for Sega's mascot, and though far from perfect, it was an interesting update after so many years of anticipation. Sonic Team could have easily settled on a simple 3D interpretation of the classic *Sonic* games but went so much further, incorporating many contemporary ideas such as vast explorable areas in addition to its linear, rollercoaster-like levels. The focus was also broadened far beyond Sonic himself, allowing control of six different characters, all of whom had their own adventure and style of play. A great idea in theory, this proved successful from a game design perspective but didn't exactly make *Sonic Adventure* popular with those who didn't like the series' ever-expanding cast.

> **"The rise of the Mega Drive days, the big comeback on the Dreamcast followed by a low point and ultimately the modern era's focus on classic values"**

Sonic Adventure also divided fans by lending a voice to its characters, almost turning the game into an interactive cartoon. American voice actor Ryan Drummond portrayed Sonic and recalls the loose approach that Sega took towards defining

Sonic Timeline

A quick guide to Sonic's most memorable games… and a few others

Sonic Advance
Game Boy Advance | 2001
Having spurned Nintendo's GBA in favour of less popular handhelds, it was great to see the little fella finally getting the small screen attention he deserved and, best of all, it was an all-new adventure, which drew upon elements from all his previous outings.





Sonic Advance 2
Game Boy Advance | 2002
Having become one of the bestselling GBA titles, it was a pretty safe bet that Sega would ensure that *Sonic* would return. Not only is this a better game than the original GBA outing but it also introduces us to the rather oddly named Cream the Rabbit…

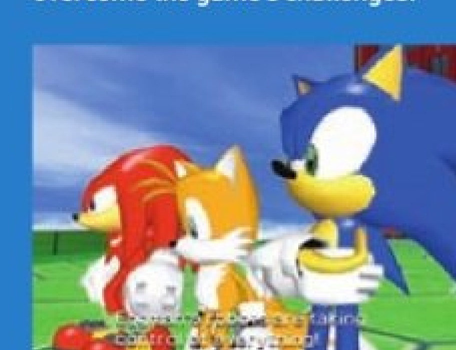
Sonic Battle
Game Boy Advance | 2003
A woefully bad fighting game, *Sonic Battle* tried to cash in on the popularity of Nintendo's *Super Smash Bros* series on a system that wasn't nearly powerful enough to pull off a game of that calibre. This is one *Sonic* spin-off game that's best avoided.





Sonic Pinball Party
Game Boy Advance | 2003
A fun little pinball sim that also happened to feature tables based on other Sega fan favourites *NiGHTS Into Dreams* and *Samba De Amigo*. *Sonic Pinball Party* wasn't quite as clever as the Mega Drive's *Sonic Spinball*, but it was still pretty good fun.

Sonic Heroes
Multi | 2003
Sonic made his cross-platform debut in style with this underrated platformer, which played like *Sonic Adventure 2* but with a new system that saw three characters teaming up at once. Players had to swap between all three to overcome the game's challenges.



such an important part of the character. "At the audition, there was a picture of Sonic hanging up in the voiceover booth," he remembers. "The direction I got from the studio engineer was more of a question: 'If you heard a voice coming out of that blue hedgehog, what would it sound like?' I knew Sonic was all about energy and speed and youth, so I just thought it over, opened my mouth, and that's what came out. I remember that I didn't have time to rehearse it. I didn't even know what the voice was going to sound like until I was actually doing it into the microphone for the Sega folks. It just happened."

Sonic himself also got a complete overhaul with *Sonic Adventure*. Redesigned by Yuji Uekawa, a Sonic Team veteran with experience dating back to *Ristar*, the new Sonic was a much edgier creation. Taller, slimmer and somehow spikier, he'd lost a little of his friendliness but made up for it with an anime-style cool. This is the Sonic that has remained ever since, though the games have been wildly different.

Part of the reason for this was Sega's switch to multiformat development. After abandoning the Dreamcast, the company had to take Sonic to new frontiers, creating games for Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo formats for the first time. Our hero probably felt most at home on Nintendo formats, which had a similar user base to that of the Dreamcast, so both *Sonic Adventure* games were quickly ported to the GameCube, in addition to the friendly and colourful new *Sonic Heroes*. But Sega also made some rather unfortunate assumptions about its new audiences. The huge Western focus of the Xbox and PlayStation 2, for example, led Sonic Team to believe that the consoles' owners would prefer a moodier, more violent *Sonic* game, and so the developer created the terribly misguided *Shadow The Hedgehog*, in which Sonic's nemesis embarrassingly wields two handguns and drives a truck.

"As he became more 'hip with attitude', Sonic became faster and faster," notes Christian Senn of this later period of *Sonic* history. "I think it was good to push boundaries, explore new avenues, and learn what worked and what didn't so that successive games could improve. One element I think had a difficult time translating into 3D was the precision control offered in the 2D games. Pushing more towards blinding speed and combat seemed to be a trend, as well as introducing many new characters. Some amazing environments, visuals, gameplay mechanics and special effects have

Developer Quotes

"I bought a Genesis during my early days at LucasArts, and I still keep it hooked up. I have only a dozen games for it now, and two are *Sonic The Hedgehog*. The first one came with the machine. I'm not sure if I, an allegedly cool and sophisticated 20-something, would have purchased a platformer about a cute animal, but there it was, so I gave it a whirl. It was highly addictive, and I played it relentlessly. I liked zooming around, flinging myself into the air – in fact, my enjoyment of *Sonic* was not unlike my enjoyment of pinball. If I close my eyes I can still hear the jingling sound of rings."

Dave Grossman, Telltale Games



» [Dreamcast] Some series fans still can't utter the name 'Shadow' without shuddering.



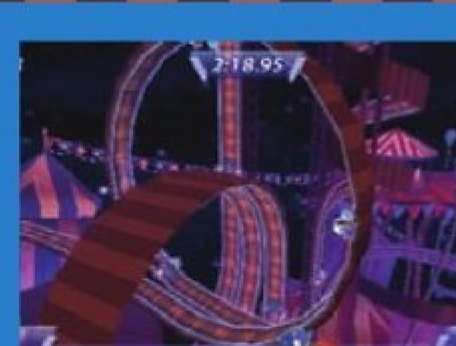
» *Sonic Spinball* was turned into a rollercoaster at Alton Towers, where it remains today.



Sonic Advance 3
Game Boy Advance | 2004
The final GBA game focused on the interplay between Sonic and his co-stars. A tag system allowed you to swap between two characters on the fly, a bit like *Donkey Kong Country*, while various pairings unlocked different abilities depending on the combinations.

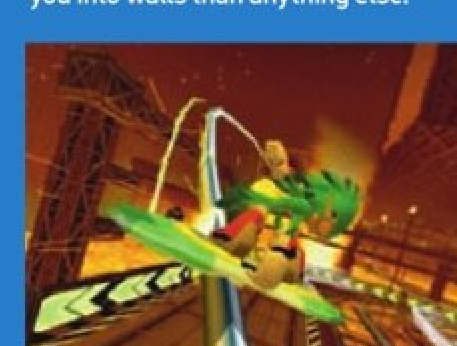
Sonic Rush
DS | 2005
After showing a terrible over-the-shoulder *Sonic* DS demo at E3 2004, Sega went back to the drawing board and returned with this effort. Its major innovation was the use of two screens for huge loops and other fun bits of level design.

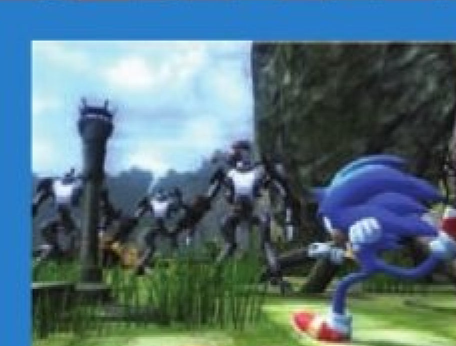




Sonic Rivals
PSP | 2006
Though it looks like a platform game, *Sonic Rivals* is actually a pretty clever side-scrolling racing game. It's also, strangely, the first *Sonic* game to break with its roots and not be released in Japan, but don't let that put you off. It's actually pretty decent.

Sonic Riders
Multi | 2006
Yet another *Sonic*-themed racing game, this one used the same engine as the Sega-developed *F-Zero GX* and saw Sonic and chums riding hoverboards. Sadly, it was total rubbish and spent more time firing you into walls than anything else.





Sonic The Hedgehog
Multi | 2006
Sonic arrived on HD consoles in a game that looked promising and was reminiscent of the original *Sonic Adventure*, only far inferior in quality. This unfortunate reboot is the main reason that people assume all modern *Sonic* games to be rubbish.

been created throughout the years that really did appeal to me."

It's quite fashionable to write off all modern *Sonic* games as rubbish, but the truth is that they've been of varying quality, ranging from abysmal to brilliant. The 2006 version of *Sonic The Hedgehog* was a total disaster, featuring some really dodgy gameplay and a worrying relationship between hedgehog and human girl. And then there's *Sonic Unleashed*, an initially promising platform game that absolutely ruined itself with a series of awful beat-'em-up levels in which Sonic transforms into a sort of werewolf thing with big stretchy arms. But then there's *Sonic Rush*, a fun little 2D platformer with the added bonus of skating-style grinds and tricks that actually fit very comfortably into the regular gameplay. Or even the recently released *Sonic The Hedgehog 4* and *Sonic Colours*, both extremely playable platform games that happened to ditch the furry friends.

"I've got to say that *Sonic* has always worked best in 2D, in my opinion," says Jon Burton of Traveller's Tales. "I also think that the character from *Sonic Adventure* onwards changed, and I didn't like it as much. The cameras in those games I found really hard work compared to something like *Mario 64* as well. Personally, I think a blend of what we do in the *Lego* series of games and the traditional 2D *Sonic* gameplay style would make for an amazing game. You have my number, Sega…"

Tyler Sigman, lead designer on *Sonic Rivals,* agrees: "The franchise has definitely changed, but that's something to be expected. In *Sonic*'s case, I'd say it's a bit of a victim of its own success. What I mean by that is that *Sonic* is a great 2D side-scrolling platformer franchise. I think the translation to 3D has had more misses than hits. That's not to say they are all terrible, but the quality has varied a lot and in general I think it remains a better side-scrolling game than over-the-shoulder game."

It's certainly true that the best *Sonic* games of recent years are the ones that play in the traditional style, but you can't ignore the fact that some of the worst are also the ones with the most unnecessary additional characters. Shadow the Hedgehog, Silver the Hedgehog, Big the Cat, Cream the Rabbit, Blaze the Cat and Rouge the Bat… All were unnecessary and all annoying. Thankfully, Sega seems to have finally realised this and has mostly relegated them to ensemble pieces like *Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games* or *Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing*, keeping the platform games focused purely on Sonic himself. Or Sonic *themselves,* if the latest game is anything to go by.

Designed to celebrate Sonic's 20th anniversary, the upcoming *Sonic Generations* is teaming its hero up with the 1991 version of himself, taking the series full circle with both completely 3D and 2D levels depending on which Sonic you choose to play as. We'd ask you, the reader, which you're


» [Mega Drive] *Sonic 3D*, while flawed and not truly 3D, was a reasonable attempt at bringing Sonic into the third dimension.

Developer Quotes

"Up until the point where I had moved out on my own, I had been primarily a Nintendo fan, at least in regards to home consoles. My NES had carried me through high school and college, as the Master System hadn't quite done it for me. This changed when *Sonic* arrived on the Genesis. As a young man with little money, struggling with new-found responsibilities, it took careful consideration to determine what games I'd buy, but there was no getting around it: I had to have this amazing, impossibly fast blue creature running amok. Sonic was the character who turned me into a Sega fanatic."

James Mielke, Q Entertainment

Sonic Timeline

A quick guide to Sonic's most memorable games… and a few others

Sonic Rivals 2
PSP | 2007

Sonic Rivals 2 was pretty much more of the same as last time out, except that it expanded the cast of playable characters from five to eight. Each character was also paired off with a team-mate who would run behind them, harking back to *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*.



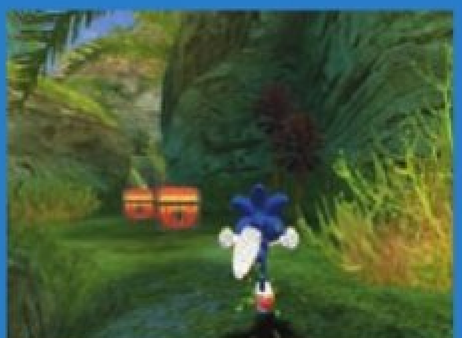


Sonic Rush Adventure
DS | 2007

A fairly unsuccessful sequel, *Sonic Rush Adventure* spoiled its otherwise excellent gameplay by implementing totally unnecessary seafaring sections, reminiscent of the similarly divisive sequences in *The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker*, only much worse.

Sonic And The Secret Rings
Wii | 2007

Sonic has had a fairly good run of games on the Wii, and his debut on the system was very good indeed. An over-the-shoulder platform game, it made good use of the Wii Remote's tilt controls for a fast and intuitive rollercoaster ride of an experience.





Sonic Unleashed
Multi | 2008

Titled *Sonic World Adventure* in Japan, this 3D *Sonic* game promised to revitalize the series by mixing *Sonic Adventure*-style 3D gameplay with more classic 2D assault courses. But it ruined all that by adding 'werehog' sections with tedious beat-'em-up gameplay.

Sonic Chronicles
DS | 2008

The first and only *Sonic* RPG, *Sonic Chronicles* was actually made by BioWare, the Canadian studio behind high-profile RPGs like *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age*. *Chronicles* wasn't quite up to its usual standard but was one of the better *Sonic* spin-offs produced.



Sonic's Cameos

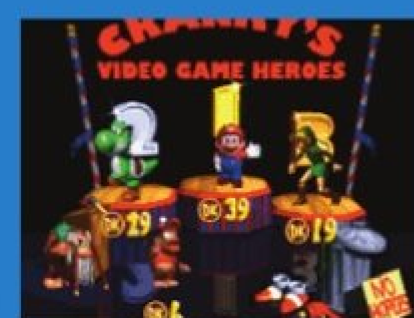
Sonic is so famous, he's even appeared in a bunch of other characters' games too. Here are some of the most notable



RAD MOBILE
This 3D arcade racing game from AM2 and Yu Suzuki features a Sonic-shaped air freshener hanging in front of the windscreen. Interestingly, this was actually the first appearance of Sonic, predating his Mega Drive debut by about six months.



SOLEIL
A Mega Drive RPG with similarities to *The Legend Of Zelda*, *Soleil* features a scene in which Sonic can be found sunbathing on a beach with his feet up. All that running around, defeating Dr Robotnik, must tire him out.



DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2
Years before Sega and Nintendo made friends, the latter took a swipe at Sonic here. The ranking screen features a number of famous Nintendo characters but alludes to Sonic and Earthworm Jim in the category of 'No Hopers'.



CHRISTMAS NiGHTS
This free Christmas-themed edition of Sonic Team's *NiGHTS Into Dreams* allowed you to collect several interactive Christmas gifts within the game, including one where you could play the game as Sonic and fight a huge, round Dr Eggman boss.



SUPER SMASH BROS BRAWL
After years of rumour, Sonic finally got to fight his rival in the Wii's *Super Smash Bros Brawl*, and he even got his own stage based on Green Hill Zone, with a newly rearranged version of the Angel Island Zone theme from *Sonic 3*.

"Sega wanted its own Mario; a character to help shift consoles. What it got is a character that has helped Sega through good times and bad"

most looking forward to playing but, well, that should be obvious really, shouldn't it?

If you were to summarise the career of Sonic over these past 20 years, you could definitely say that he's lived an interesting life. The meteoric rise of the Mega Drive days, the explosion into popular culture, the wilderness years of the Saturn, the big comeback on the Dreamcast followed by a low point of mediocrity and over-saturation and ultimately into the modern era and its focus on quality, experimentation and classic values. It's definitely, appropriately, been a series of ups and downs, even loops. But it's testament to Sonic's enduring popularity that he's managed to bounce back from any low point in this time. So many Sega franchises have been lost to the annals of history, and even the company's own hardware business is long since expired. But Sonic lives on. Sega wanted its own Mario; a character to help shift consoles. But what it got is something slightly different; a character that has helped Sega through good times and bad and has gone on to become a hero to all gamers, no matter which console they happen to own.

Developer Quotes

"The first time I heard about *Sonic* was when someone commented that it was overrated and that the music was pretty bad. It motivated me to rent a Mega Drive and check it out for myself. Having a new console for a day was quite a special experience and I played the game until it had to be returned.

"I don't think I finished it, but I remember being impressed by the special stages and the loops. I did not fall in love with the game that day, although I feel a connection with the character since then and I've wanted it to be awesome for the last 20 years. Perhaps *Sonic Generations* will be?"

Collin van Ginkel, co-founder Two Tribes



Sonic And The Black Knight
Wii | 2009
One of the more derided modern *Sonic* games, *Sonic And The Black Knight* is actually much better than it's given credit for. Set in a medieval fantasy world, it re-imagines the *Sonic* characters as knights of the round table and equips them all with swords.

Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode I
Multi | 2010
Returning to the series' roots, this completely 2D game starred only Sonic himself and played fairly close to the style of the original Mega Drive trilogy. Only some slightly stodgy physics stopped it from being perfect.

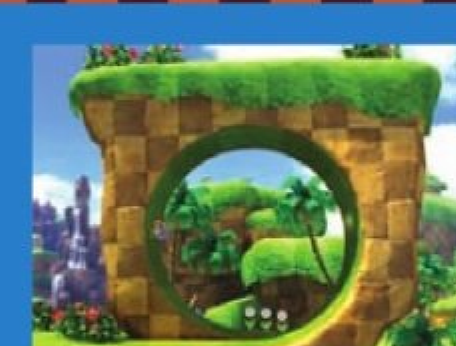




Sonic Colours
Wii | 2010
One of the best *Sonic* games in recent years, *Sonic Colours* featured mostly side-on gameplay as well as collectable Wisps that temporarily change Sonic's abilities. It almost played like a cross between *Sonic Adventure 2* and *NiGHTS Into Dreams*.

Sonic Colours
DS | 2010
The DS version of *Sonic Colours* went even further than the Wii version in its drive to return to a more classical 2D style of *Sonic* gameplay. Some people even believe that it's the superior version of the two… and they happen to be correct.





Sonic Generations
Multi | 2011
Though not yet released, *Sonic Generations* looks to be another great *Sonic* game. Teaming up the modern version of Sonic with the more cartoony retro version, it allows you to play any stage either completely in 3D or completely in 2D. It's about time too.

The Making Of Sonic Adventure

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of Sonic we caught up with Takashi Iizuka, the current head of Sonic Team and a Sega veteran since 1991, to talk about one of his most important productions, 2001's Sonic Adventure

Retro Gamer: What was the biggest difficulty you faced in creating a 3D *Sonic* game?
Takashi Iizuka: Even Sonic Team had never seen a 3D *Sonic* game at that time, as they'd only worked on the Mega Drive games. I had a vision of what a 3D *Sonic* would look like; I could see it in my mind, but none of the other team members could imagine it. So my main difficulty was educating the team on what exactly the game would be, answering their questions and giving them direction.

RG: How much pressure did you feel internally at Sega and from the fans?
TI: Because there were no *Sonic* games on Saturn the gap between the Mega Drive games and *Sonic Adventure* was a very long time, so I felt a huge weight of expectation from the fans. Internally at Sega, *Sonic Adventure* was a huge project for the company and just kept increasing in size, so the pressure was immense and grew by the day. But once we got to a certain point in development when everyone could see the game coming together and the development team gained confidence, Sega management were really able to visualise what we were working toward and the pressure started to ease off.

RG: Did you always intend to use voice actors and how did you go about casting them?
TI: Yes, it was planned from the beginning. The title of *Sonic Adventure* was always there from the start because we wanted the game to have a big, epic feel. Because it was to be more story-focused it only made sense that the characters would speak to each other. As for the casting, because nobody had ever heard Sonic speak, even on the dev team, there were a lot of differing opinions between the staff on what he should sound like. We all had a voice that we imagined in our mind, but the part we agreed on was that we shouldn't be using an anime voice actor and that we should be targeting a Japanese actor with movie experience. When you see a Hollywood movie, there is often a professional Japanese actor speaking over the top and we decided that we wanted that type of actor rather than an animation actor.

RG: Why did you decide to introduce the adventure scenes in addition to the platforming?
TI: In the previous *Sonic* games he could only ever go forward or backward, but in a 3D game

» [Dreamcast] Knuckles' hunting for emerald shards was one of the gameplay styles in *Sonic Adventure* to survive into the sequel.



Sonic Through The Ages

Sonic Generations brings Sonic full circle as his early design makes a comeback



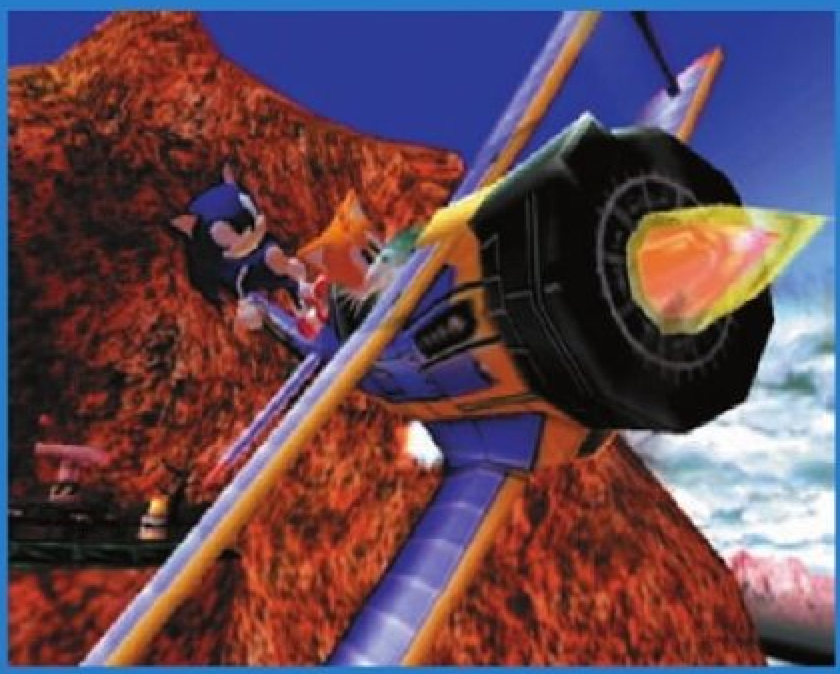
he could travel in all directions and we felt like we had to make use of that space. Platforming was still what made a *Sonic* game a *Sonic* game, but we now had this new dimension to play with and we had to think how we could make the best use of it. And that's where we came up with the adventure parts, giving the player an element of discovery in addition to the platforming.

RG: The musical style is quite different to the old games, more focused on rock songs with vocal tracks. What was the reason for that?
TI: Just from a technical perspective, we had more space available on the disc so there was space for better graphics and voice acting and, of course, better music. We were previously limited to the FM chip in the Mega Drive, but now we had limitless potential, so we wanted to take advantage of it with vocal music tracks. We picked the rock style because a major part of the plot, the Chaos theme, was not present in earlier games and we wanted to reflect that in a darker, heavier style of music.

RG: Where did the Chao idea come from?
TI: The Chao concept was influenced by the Nightopians from *NiGHTS*. The idea was to have something that changed every time you came back to the game. So we had the high-speed gameplay of Sonic but we also had something slower and more thoughtful in the Chao gameplay.



» [Dreamcast] By keeping Sonic's stages largely on-rails, the team made the best of *Sonic* gameplay in a 3D world.


» [Dreamcast] The shooting sections, as well as being graphically incredible, played in a way that was reminiscent of classic Sega coin-ops.

RG: *Sonic Adventure* and its sequel are still well-regarded as the best 3D *Sonic* games. Why do you think that is?
TI: It's hard to say why they're so well-regarded. But for *Sonic Adventure*, it was an ambitious project and the team tried lots of ideas and crammed it with as much content as we could. When it came time to make the sequel we looked at the first game and realised that there were a few elements that didn't need to be there, so in *Sonic Adventure 2* we concentrated only on the concepts that were necessary. The sequel is a much more refined and composed version of *Sonic Adventure* and, in a way, I think that it's one of the better-made *Sonic* games and the closest we've come to a perfect 3D *Sonic*.



RG: How did you feel about the Dreamcast at the time, and how do you look back at it now?
TI: *Sonic Adventure* was the launch title for Dreamcast and that meant that we were developing the game in conjunction with the console itself. We were able to make a number of requests to the hardware team. For example, to make the game as good as possible we had to go to the hardware team and request even more RAM be added to the Dreamcast. There was a lot of discussion between the hardware and software teams. Because the Dreamcast is a console that was brought to life alongside *Sonic Adventure*, it feels to me that the two are intrinsically attached to each other. I have a lot of special emotions towards the Dreamcast and I still believe that it's a very good piece of hardware. Because I was technically involved in the production of that hardware I have nothing but warm feelings when I look back at it.

"The sequel is a much more refined version of Sonic Adventure, and, in a way, I think that it's the closest we've come to a perfect 3D Sonic"





2003 | 2006 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011

CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAPASCHIPS



If there's one thing we've learnt about retro gaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than a fiver…

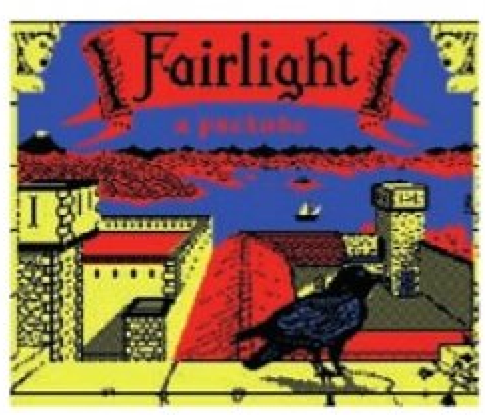
FAIRLIGHT

Even back in 1985, familiarity was starting to breed contempt. As gamers enjoyed blasts of *Knight Lore*, *Tir Na Nog* and *Avalon*, so the premise of games like *Fairlight* began to lose their attraction. There were just too many castle-type wizard games about, you see. Fantasy was wearing a little thin.

Then again, the roll of eyes soon gave way to fixated stares. Gamers just adored crisp graphics, and this game by The Edge – a company which has fared less well in the eyes of many in the intervening years – soon came to be acclaimed as a classic of its day. And rightly so.

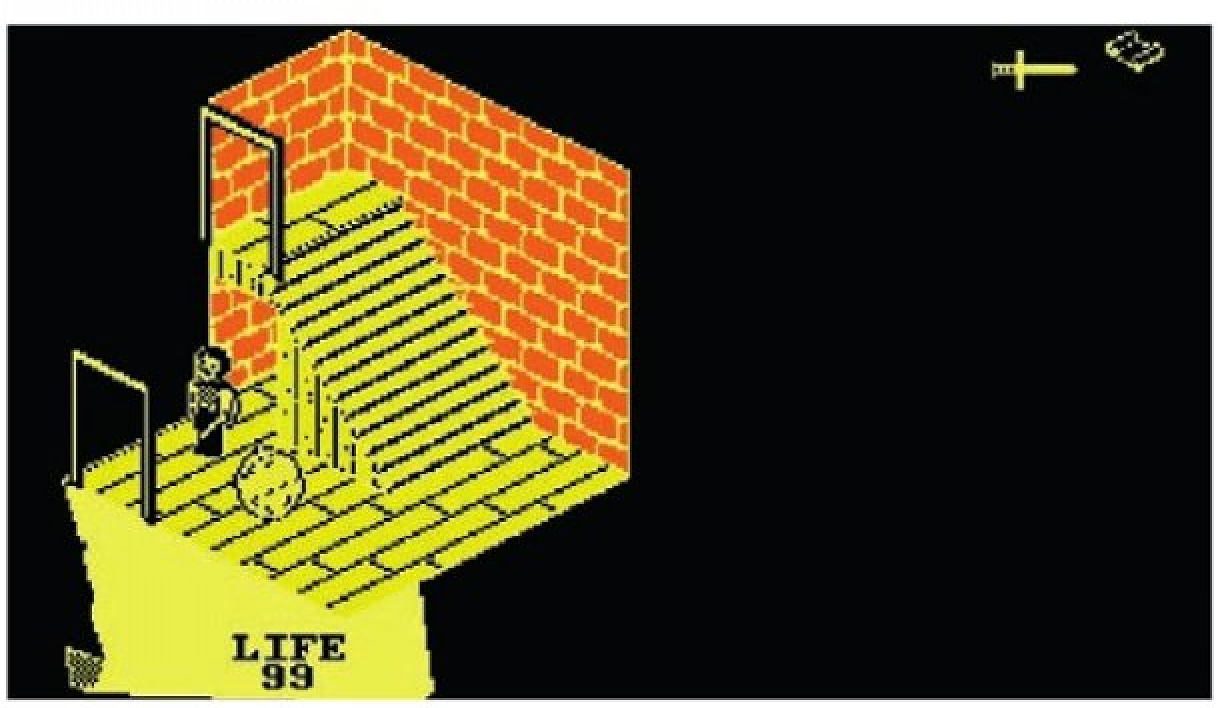
INFO

- **SYSTEM:** ZX SPECTRUM
- **RELEASED:** 1985
- **PUBLISHER:** EDGE GAMES
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** AMSTRAD CPC, AMSTRAD PCW, COMMODORE 64

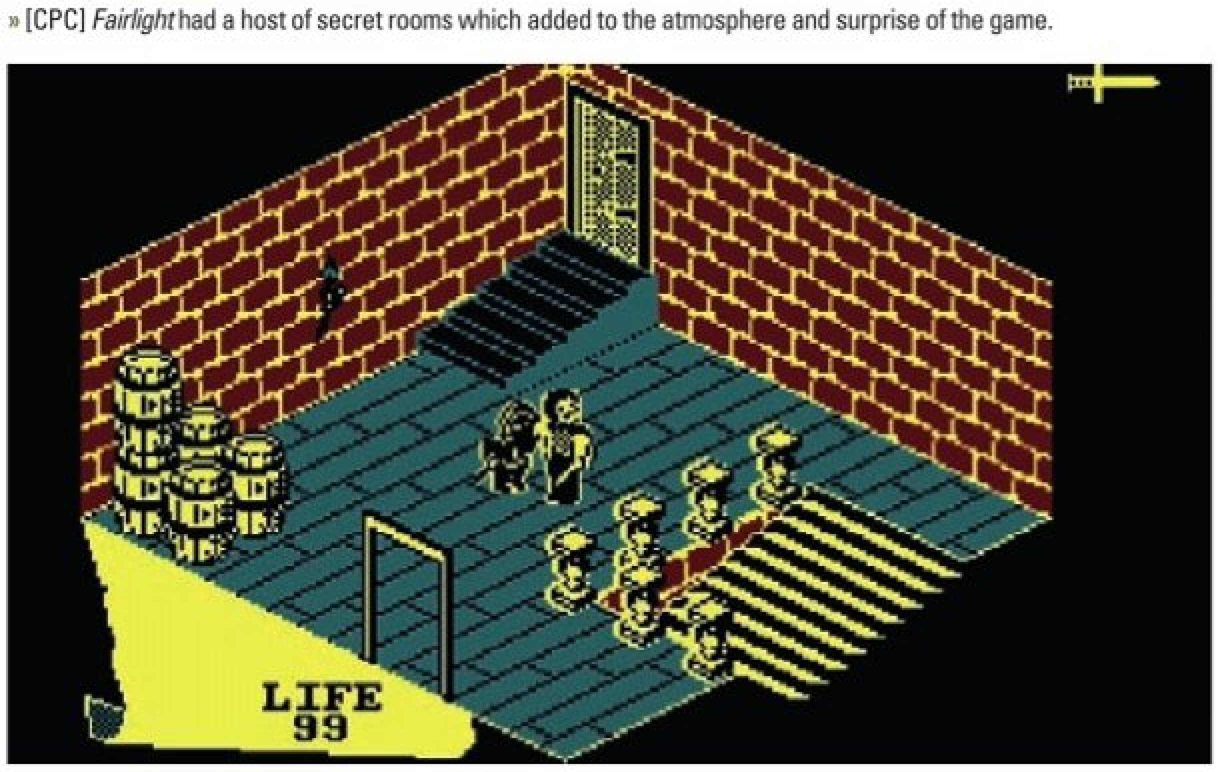




» [CPC] Puzzles galore and one or two locked doors... all part and parcel of castle exploration.



» [CPC] *Fairlight* had a host of secret rooms which added to the atmosphere and surprise of the game.

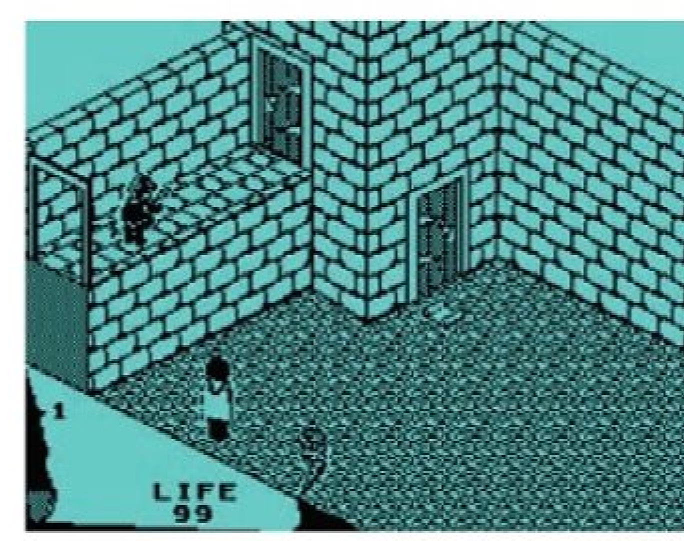


The hero, Isvar, made his merry way through the corridors and chambers of the castle, nipping up and down stairs, avoiding guards and trolls and learning the hard way that swords were no match for the evil wraith. The aim was to find the Book of Light in order to rescue a sorcerer.

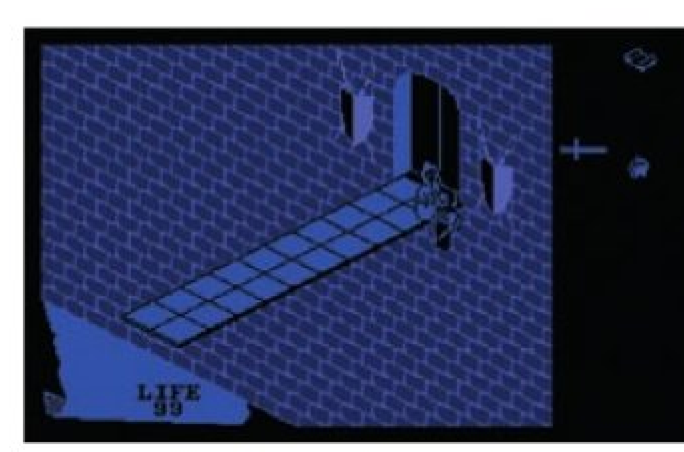
The solution was a long time coming, given the sheer hordes of nasties that could zap your life force, making the game part battle and part scour-the-land-to-replenish-health (bread and chicken went down well). All of this was played out against a 3D isometric backdrop. You had to watch your step or else you'd end up kicking a vital object under a table and find you just couldn't get it back. Having said that, you could move tables and chairs about the place, useful for getting at high objects. In actual fact, the distance you ended up booting an object was closely allied to its weight. And weight was an important factor in this game, determining, as it did, just how many objects you could carry at once.

With more than 80 locations, this was a big adventure packed not only with the castle but caves and towers, drawbridges and secret nooks and crannies. Gameplay was, in many ways, familiar in terms of collecting objects and securing keys and, while we wouldn't go as far as saying the visuals were realistic (even though that was the consensus in the unspoiled Eighties), it did feel more akin to real-life of sorts than the 2D affairs of the time.

There were other neat additions, such as being able to leave an object in a room, then come back and see it still there. We also loved the way the character had one advantage over the others pottering about the place: he could jump.



» [ZX Spectrum] The graphics of the Spectrum original were crisp and widely acclaimed by critics.



It's a shame, then, that unfavourable comparisons were made to other fantasy games that came out at around the same time, because beyond its generic setting and story there was a unique quality about *Fairlight* that helped it stand up on its own merits (the game used a low-level graphics language called Grax). The Edge didn't rest on its laurels, either, and a retooled 128k version was soon released with enhanced music.

Fairlight didn't make its way to other formats until the following year, by which time players had been spoiled by *Get Dexter* and *Batman* too. However, it was testament to *Fairlight*'s strength that reviews were positive across the board.


HOW IT WORKS
CONDENSED
COULD RAISE YOUR IQ!
Knowledge Soup
Made from wholesome bite sized chunks of knowledge
SCIENCE ENVIRONMENT TECHNOLOGY TRANSPORT HISTORY SPACE


THE MAGAZINE THAT FEEDS MINDS
HOW IT WORKS
EXPLAINING THE WORLD'S
GREATEST MYTHS

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home





IN DEPTH

» Each level is scattered with weapons like guns, swords, grenades and even rocket launchers. Getting to them before your opponent is a crucial part of *The Outfoxies*' gameplay.

» *The Outfoxies*' levels change dramatically over time. When this whale drops from the ceiling it breaks many of the floors and smashes tanks open, flooding the stage and releasing the sharks.

» The detail and scale of the sprite work in *The Outfoxies* is extremely impressive. You can see how home systems of the time would have struggled to run an arcade-perfect version.

THE OUTFOXIES

■ **Developer:** Namco ■ **Year:** 1994 ■ **Genre:** Fighting

■ **One of the best arcade fighting games ever created, *The Outfoxies* is, sadly, one that very few people ever talk about. Perhaps that's because it was never distributed widely enough for many people to be exposed to it, or maybe it's because the game was so unusual, eschewing the popular *Street Fighter* template that virtually every other fighting game adopted at the time.**

Track it down now, however, and you'll find that Namco's little-known coin-op is actually something of a hidden gem. The first thing you'll notice about the brawler, upon inserting a credit, is that its cast of fighters is far from the usual suspects. How many fighting games have you seen, for example, where you can play as a man in a wheelchair? Or two twin girls who hold hands the entire time they're fighting? Not many, we'd wager.

The unusual cast is only the start of *The Outfoxies*' madness, as you'll see when you actually start a stage. Each of its levels is huge, completely dynamic and looks amazing. Using ambitious sprite-scaling technology, it presented 2D stages that could move and change great chunks of themselves right in the middle of the battle as well as zoom the camera close in or really far out depending on where both players were. The first stage, for example, sees you fighting on board a speeding steam train. You can jump between the carriages, drop down inside them and even run along the front of the engine, obscured by the steam that billows from the front. As the train moves through tunnels and past other obstacles, it's possible to get knocked from the top and battered underneath the wheels as you drop to the track below. But if you're a cunning player you can use this to your advantage, playing in such a way that you goad your opponent into a vulnerable position so that they're the one to suffer the effects of the environmental hazards, which is probably where the game's unusual title comes from: you have to outfox your opponent to win.

Other crazy level designs include an aquarium that features a giant whale at the centre, which eventually drops to the floor and causes the building to flood, as well as the interior of a massive aeroplane that tilts in real-time. Such features make *The Outfoxies* one of the most exciting fighting games to play and surely had a huge influence on later madcap brawlers like the *Super Smash Bros* series and *Power Stone 2*.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

ELEVATOR ACTION RETURNS 1994

Though it's not a versus game, *Elevator Action Returns* looks similar to *The Outfoxies* and shares a commitment to fluid animation and dramatic gameplay. It was converted to the Saturn in Japan in 1997 and made it to the UK as part of *Taito Legends 2* in 2006.

DOG FIGHT

Developer: Thunderbolt **Year:** 1983 **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up



» [Arcade] *Dog Fight* isn't the genre's best, nor its prettiest, but it's more fun than it looks.

The shoot-'em-up genre was absolutely massive in the arcades, which explains why they constantly crop up in The Unconverted.

This particular one initially feels like it should have been shunted below to 'Best Left In The Arcade', but once you get to grips with it, you discover that it's a surprisingly good and very challenging shooter.

Dog Fight places you in the metal shell of one of the most unmanoeuvrable jet fighters of all time. You can move left and right and that's about it. The difference here, though, is that moving left and right tilts your plane and alters its direction of fire.

At first this is highly frustrating, but as you become used to it, you soon start to appreciate the challenging attack patterns, basic sprite design and the huge number of bullets that are thrown at you. The audio is sparse and the score mechanics are extremely rudimentary, but *Dog Fight* is still a lot of fun to play. Its limited controls initially make it feel rather old-hat compared to the more well-known likes of *Juno First* and *Time Pilot*, but *Dog Fight* still has plenty of merit for the hardcore shooter enthusiast.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

TIME PILOT 1982



While they look aesthetically similar, *Time Pilot* is the far better game thanks to fluid controls, better variety in its enemies and a nice risk and reward mechanic thanks to the inclusion of parachutists. It's also available on a variety of home systems, including Xbox Live Arcade.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

OPERATION THUNDERBOLT 1988



Another Taito coin-op and another game that features into-the-screen action. This follow-up to *Operation Wolf* ups the ante by delivering some blisteringly good visuals and excellent co-operative play. It received some great home conversions as well.

ENFORCE

Developer: Taito **Year:** 1989 **Genre:** On-rails shooter



» [Arcade] When you think about it, adapting a racing engine to an on-rails shooter actually makes a lot of sense.

Considering that *Enforce* is based on Taito's *Continental Circus* engine, the games themselves would struggle to be more different. While *Continental Circus* took the form of a grand prix racing game, *Enforce* puts you in control of a bloody big tank and lets you run riot with it.

Taking the form of an on-rails shooter, the first thing that hits you about *Enforce* is just how relentless the action is. Constantly scrolling into the screen, enemies come in all shapes and sizes and won't hesitate to give your twitchy crosshairs a good old-fashioned workout. Tanks, helicopters, foot soldiers, robots and gunboats are just a few of the objects that stand in your way, but all melt away in the face of your ridiculously powerful gunfire.

Luckily, the game stays balanced due to the fact that one of your weapons, an insanely powerful rocket, takes a while to charge, meaning that you can't be too reckless with it. In fact, the only downside to *Enforce* is that it suffers from some dull stationary bosses – basically gun emplacement barriers – that just aren't exciting compared to the chaos that precedes them. Still, it'll give adrenaline junkies a good rush.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

MAD CRASH

Developer: SNK **Year:** 1984 **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up



This had the potential to be really good. After all, it's a hectic racer-cum-blaster where you're either zipping past the opposition or simply blowing them to bits. Sadly, the fantasy is far better than the reality and the end result is for all its interesting premise, *Mad Crash* is simply too dull to hold your attention.

Maybe it's the fact that this was SNK's first venture into the world of isometric gaming, which explains why the gameplay is so pedestrian. Everything moves along at a surprisingly sluggish pace, which makes it all too easy to make progress. Vehicles rarely change lanes either, so what could have been a fast and furious racer becomes a fairly dull stroll that's about as taxing as putting your socks on.

Things become even easier with the addition of the jump button, which sends your vehicle into the air for far too long, making even shooting opponents rather pointless. It's little wonder then that it never received a home release.



BUGABOO [THE FLEA]

Bugaboo (The Flea) was not only a strikingly original early Spectrum game, it helped kick-start the whole Spanish software industry. Paul Drury says 'hola' to Paco and Paco, the pioneering pair that made the little bug leap

The stars aligned when Paco met Paco and *Bugaboo* was born. You can see them for yourself on-screen, as this unique game fills up the Spectrum's 48k of memory with colourful caverns, a dangerous dragon and an indomitable little flea.

"The stars on the loading screen correspond to those which were in the sky on 7 July 1983, at the time when my adventure in Madrid began," explains Paco Portalo. "The star Gamma Andromedae was at its zenith, when it becomes a blue ball, which gradually increases in size. With a bit of imagination, you may also make out the Pleiades, in the top-right-hand area beneath Perseus, and on the left, Cassiopeia, next to some more stars and constellations."

It's a lovely personal touch in a game full of character. This cinematic opening chronicles the journey to an unknown planet in the Almat-1 Sector, and sees our insect protagonist tumble helplessly to the bottom of an alien cavern system. The player is charged with aiding *Bugaboo*'s escape through carefully judged leaps from ledge to ledge towards the surface and freedom, an apparently simple task that proves to be staggeringly difficult to achieve. Its original concept, expansive scrolling playfield and exotic visuals meant the game was one of the highlights of the Spectrum's early years.

Actually, 7 July marked a re-uniting rather than a meeting of Paco Portalo and Paco Suarez. They were old friends, and that summer night in the Spanish capital was when Portalo joined Suarez at Indescomp, where the latter was already working on *Bugaboo* for Sinclair's new machine, the ZX Spectrum.

The pair had long shared an interest in the emerging world of home computing. Suarez had a little knowledge of the programming languages Fortran and BASIC gained whilst studying physics at Seville in the late Seventies. Portalo's first experience of coding dated back to 1975, when, as a student at the University of Extremadura, he used



IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** INDESCOMP
- **» DEVELOPER:** PACO AND PACO
- **» RELEASED:** 1983
- **» PLATFORM:** SPECTRUM
- **» GENRE:** LEAP 'EM OUT

an early programmable calculator – the Compucorp Scientist 3255 – to simulate a bouncing ball, though as the only output was a paper roll printer, this wasn't going to lead to any early *Pong* clones.

The arrival of the ZX81 changed everything. "I abandoned the university project I was involved in and considered another one utilising that little black box with its keyboard of bubbles,' explains Portalo, poetically. "This was where my working relationship with Suarez began. We had been friends for a long time, and I admired him for his perseverance in learning and indefatigable capacity for work."

"The ZX81 put computing within the reach of individuals," continues Suarez. "It fired our imagination, and our conversations in bars began to rotate around everything we might do with these small machines."

The sky was suddenly the limit and, appropriately enough, Portalo's new project involved using a ZX81 to physically steer a telescope to track planetary movements. This ambitious goal was helped hugely when his brother Juande, who had originally bought the machine, returned from a trip to London with a 16k RAM pack, which Portala describes as "utterly mind-blowing", hopefully referring to the huge increase in memory rather than the notoriously temperamental nature of the device.

Ably supported by Suarez, the pair soon realised that BASIC was far too slow for their purposes and, having managed to acquire a Spanish translation of Nichols and Rony's Z-80 Microprocessor Programming Boot 1, they plunged ever deeper into the numerical gobbledegook of machine code.

"It wasn't that the programming tools were poor, rather that they didn't exist," sighs Portalo. "We created our own rudimentary development environment which allowed us to manually enter into memory the zeroes and ones that made up our routines. This was pure machine code programming. We had no idea what an assembler was!"

> **"People saw computers as the work of the devil and programmers were oddballs"** PACO PORTALO

As well as assisting his friend, Suarez directed his newly acquired knowledge to more playful purposes. He produced versions of *Hangman* and *Mastermind* for the ZX81, as well as an original title, which required the player to guide a little asterisk stranded at the bottom of a staggered mineshaft to the surface in the lowest number of jumps. "I was trying to explain to my brother how a parabola could be formed," explains Suarez. "On seeing the results, I decided to incorporate a character which carried out the movement."

Now, any mathematicians reading this will be aware of the complex equations behind parabola. Us gamers know it's what made Miner Willy jump over snapping toilets in a smooth curve. Suarez decreed his leaping asterisk was actually a flea and the father of *Bugaboo* was born.

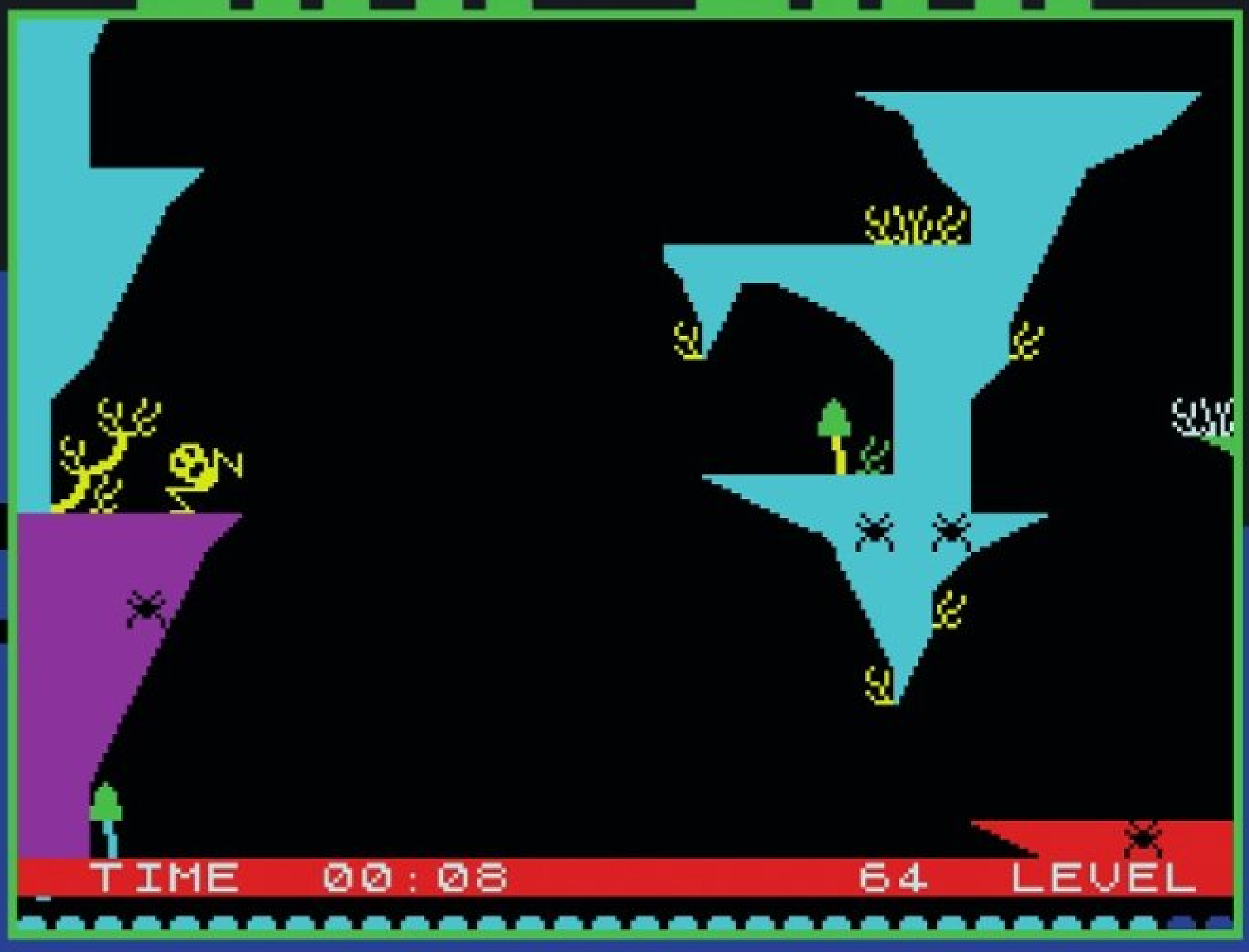
The concept was not only original, so was the control mechanism. You didn't just move left or right; the power of the flea's leap was determined by how long you held down the left or right button. To call this an early example of analogue controls might be pushing it, but it undoubtedly caught the attention of the bosses at Indescomp. The Madrid-based company was one of the main importers of software and peripherals for the ZX81, so in the spring of 1983, Suarez sent them his *La Pulga* game (Spanish for 'The Flea') for consideration. To his amazement, he received a call from the firm, saying they not only wanted to publish the game for the ZX81, they would also pay him to develop the title for a new micro, the ZX Spectrum – another surprise, as Sinclair's latest computer hadn't been seriously marketed in Spain at

BUGABOO (THE BOOK)

"IN THE EARLY Eighties, a large section of society viewed working with computers as the work of the devil and programmers were seen as oddballs," chuckles Portalo. "This only convinced us that this was the dawn of a new cybernetic era!" Since finishing work on *Bugaboo*, Portalo has been involved in many diverse endeavours, including time as a teacher, farmer, theatre technician and bullfighter's assistant. He describes his time as a games programmer as "a wonderful and indelible memory," and was duly inspired to write a book chronicling his experience and explaining the significance of *Bugaboo* in the birth of the Spanish software industry (you can find it at www.bugabootheflea.com, with an English language version based on the translation by Erica 'Paul's mum' Drury hopefully to follow). "I wanted to leave my children some evidence of what their father did when he was just a few years older than they are now," he explains. We hope this article has helped a little, too.



» Paco Portalo (far right) in 1976 with his professor, D. Manuel Garcia.



» [Spectrum] *Bugaboo* was a top seller for Quicksilva in the UK, and *Crash* awarded it 92 per cent in its February 1984 issue.

The Making Of ...

BUGABOO (THE FLEA)

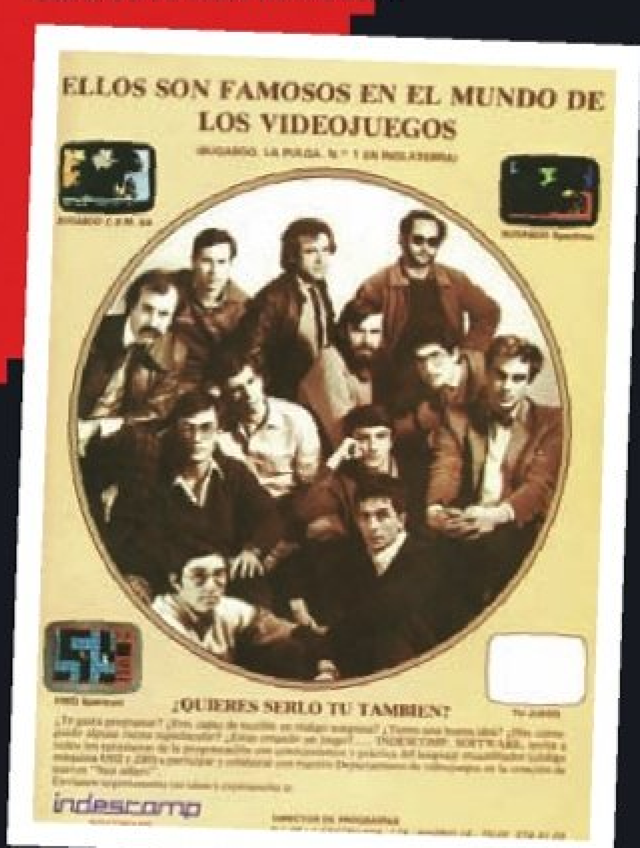
THE BUG BOUNCES BACK

"I DID IT in my spare time, as a hobby, really," says Paco Suarez of his 2006 Java version of *La Pulga* for mobile phones. "I didn't market it as it wasn't my intention to work in the commercial sector again. Recently, though, I have returned to the idea. I dragged a few friends in to undertake a small, playful commercial adventure and on January 1st 2011, we presented a new version of *Bugaboo*. At the moment, it is only available for PC but we hope to have a version for mobile phones ready this summer."

This new iteration keeps the basic premise of the original and adds new puzzles, monsters and even sees Bugaboo learning to swim. Visit http://mandanga.com/qq2/ to download the game, and for news of future developments from the flea that will not sit still…



» The Indescomp team. Portalo is wearing sunglasses and Suarez is in the middle with the beard.



this point. However, Investronica was planning to re-launch the machine in the country at the end of '83 and Indescomp wanted to be ahead of the curve.

Suarez seized the opportunity, moved to the capital, and began to work on a Spectrum update of *La Pulga*. The huge increase in memory and processing power the machine offered allowed the basic concept to be greatly developed, though it also presented new challenges for him to contend with. "Some will recall the unpleasant effects produced when using moving coloured elements, due to the design of the Spectrum's screen memory," he grimaces. "Some authors preferred to do games in almost monochrome to avoid this. I didn't want to dispense with colour and therefore spent a lot of time on obtaining a scrolling display with a minimum of what we called 'contamination of colour'."

In any language, colour clash was the bane of a Spectrum coder's life, but Suarez persevered and learned much about the internal quirks of the machine. Meanwhile, Portalo finally completed his telescope project and, with his newly gained degree tucked under his arm, set off to Madrid on 7 July 1983, looking for work in the burgeoning world of computers.

Yet before his search began in earnest, he called in to see his old friend Suarez at the Indescomp offices in Paseo de la Castellana, near Castilla Square. "I was utterly bowled over by his initial work on *The Flea* for the Spectrum," enthuses Portalo. "I was just telling him about how I'd solved my latest problem with floating point calculations when a very jovial, bearded gentleman came across and we all chatted for a while. It turned out he was the boss, Jose Luis Dominguez, and he offered me work collaborating on *The Flea*. My surprise was overwhelming."

Paco and Paco were back in business together. They rented a flat on Alcala Street and immersed themselves in the project, only stopping to sleep and eat seafood and scallop soup at the nearby 'Banquete-Bodas-Bar'. Portalo familiarised himself with the new machine and began work on the score display, the clock and what would become the 'jump meter', while Suarez concentrated on getting the scrolling routine to be as smooth as possible. With encouragement from the ever-smiling Dominguez and vital support from the technical team at the company, the game was shaping up nicely. "Every day Suarez achieved more spectacular and colourful effects, giving *The Flea* a different dimension from the games which regularly reached us from England," beams Portalo.

Portalo even created a storyboard for the animated opening sequence, which not only eased the pain of long cassette loading times but also created a context for Bugaboo's plight. "I imagined I was working on a film, hence my credit on the title screen as providing 'Special Effects'," he winks. "Even before the game starts, it absorbs the player in a story in which he is the protagonist. It was the precursor of the 'video stories' or 'video adventures', which have evolved since that dawning of the digital era."

With the Spectrum's 48K memory almost full, Dominguez suggested the name was changed to *Bugaboo*, a word his secretary had found in an English dictionary. The game was completed at the start of November 1983 and released by Quicksilva in the UK under this title, though it retained its original title of *La Pulga* in Spain, where Investronica handled the publishing.

Paco and Paco still clearly recall seeing the first review of their work

» [Spectrum] 'Bugaboo' is defined as something that 'causes fear or distress out of proportion to its importance', which is rather apt given the hair-tearing level of difficulty.





» [C64] *Bugaboo* on C64 was developed by Pedro Ruiz. Suarez: "He was and continues to be a great programmer."





in Home Computer Weekly, and were overjoyed to be featured in an international magazine, regardless of the somewhat lukewarm write-up. Gradually, more reviews from the UK games press reached Spain and these were increasingly positive. The unusual nature of the game and the esoteric mix of simplicity and extreme difficulty meant you had to spend time with it to truly appreciate its nuances. It became a slow-burning hit, with gamers and critics alike warming to its charms.

"We felt great happiness as we began to receive good reviews from the British media," smiles Suarez. "To be successful in the country that cradled the Spectrum was a source of pride."

In high spirits, the pair began planning their next project, an ambitious graphical adventure based on the classic text *Treasure Island*, but when Indescomp halted development to focus on making games for the Amstrad CPC, Portalo returned to his home region of Extremadura in Western Spain, using the money he made from *Bugaboo* to set up home with his partner. They are still together and have two children.

Suarez stayed with Indescomp and set about converting the company's back catalogue for the new machine, which of course meant our little flea making the jump across. "For *Roland In The Caves*, the Amstrad 'port' of *Bugaboo*, I used a prototype of the CPC," he explains. "The game was launched at the same time as the machine and it was one of the key factors in Indescomp subsequently becoming Amstrad Spain."

Suarez headed up the games development group for the renamed company until 1984, when he left to found Opera Soft, which became a major player in the Spanish games business for the rest of the decade. They produced over twenty titles, including the critically acclaimed *La Abadia Del Crimen* (The Abbey Of Crime, based on Umberto Eco's *The Name Of The Rose*) and *Poogaboo: La Pulga 2* for the Spectrum, Amstrad and MSX at the start of the Nineties. The latter was to be one of the company's final releases; since then, Suarez has worked as a freelance consultant in such areas as industrial control systems and image processing but retains his interest in games programming, as seen by the return of *La Pulga* this year (see The Bug Bounces Back).

As for *Bugaboo*, the plucky flea's place in the hearts of Spectrum gamers (and indeed Commodore gamers) is secure, thanks to Pedro Ruiz's excellent C64 version coded in parallel to Paco and Paco's original. His role as hero of the first Spanish game to achieve commercial and critical success abroad was also acknowledged in 2009, at the International Festival of Interactive Leisure in Gijon, where the statuettes presented to prize winners – the 'Oscars' of the Spanish games industry – were shaped as fleas. It was a fitting tribute to the little bug that leaped to great heights.

"For Bugaboo to be successful in England, the country that cradled the Spectrum, was a source of great pride" PACO SUAREZ

Special thanks to Erica Drury for her immense efforts in translating Paco Portalo's book into English and Michael Boyle for additional language support.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ROLAND IN THE CAVES
SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1984

LA ABADIA DEL CRIMEN
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM 128K
YEAR: 1988

POOGABOO: LA PULGA 2 (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM/AMSTRAD/MSX
YEAR: 1991

Zap't'Balls

A PONGY PANG?

» RETROREVIVAL



» AMSTRAD CPC
» ELMSOFT
» 1992

Clones have long been part of the gaming scene. Sometimes they are produced to better the original, while other times to pay homage to it. A few try to cash in on a trend, and a selection are developed because a particular computing system has been missed out.

Zap't'Balls was produced for the latter reason. Creator Elmar Kreiger had offered to convert Ocean's *Pang* to the Amstrad CPC, having seen the Manchester-based developer shun disk and tape-based computers in favour of the Amstrad GX4000 cartridge format.

Ocean refused, so Elmar decided to produce a clone that became rather popular among those users who just couldn't let go of their 8-bit marvels. He took all of his experience as a demo coder, packed the game with whizzy effects, and two versions were produced: a free 29-level one that was popped on to the coverdisc of *CPC Amstrad International* magazine in Germany and an Advanced Edition that was released commercially.

The game caused some controversy. Sections of the Amstrad community felt it should have received more than the 85 per cent *Amstrad Action* gave it – editor Dave Golder dubbed it a "poor rip off" of *Pang*. But it was a technical marvel; Elmar wanted as many objects as possible to move around at 50 FPS, and he wanted to show that the CPC could match the sprite capabilities of Amstrad Plus machines. It had more colours, overscan and rasters than you could fire a spring at.

Since Elmar was making the game for fun and not payment, he had creative freedom. At the time, games were picking up ideas from the demo scene, pushing the boundaries of the CPC. It meant more games were 128k-only – *Zap't'Balls* used up 48k in video memory, and the remaining 16k in a 64k machine wasn't enough.

The Advanced Edition has 80 one or two-player levels. It played in the same way as *Pang*, zapping balls which would split into two, with the aim to clear the screen of all balls. The graphics didn't always aid the gameplay – balls would get lost amid the blasts of colour – and *Pang* was better, but *Zap't'Balls* showed both the determination and skill of demo coders and the never-say-die attitude of ardent 8-bit fans. *




LIVES 6
TIME 60
LIVES 6

SPECTRUM GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT



Thousands of games were developed for the Sinclair Spectrum, of which a few dozen went unreleased. Of those, a very small number have become entwined in the fabric of gaming folklore. Martyn Carroll speaks directly to those involved to uncover fascinating new information about the greatest Spectrum games that were never released

TOKI

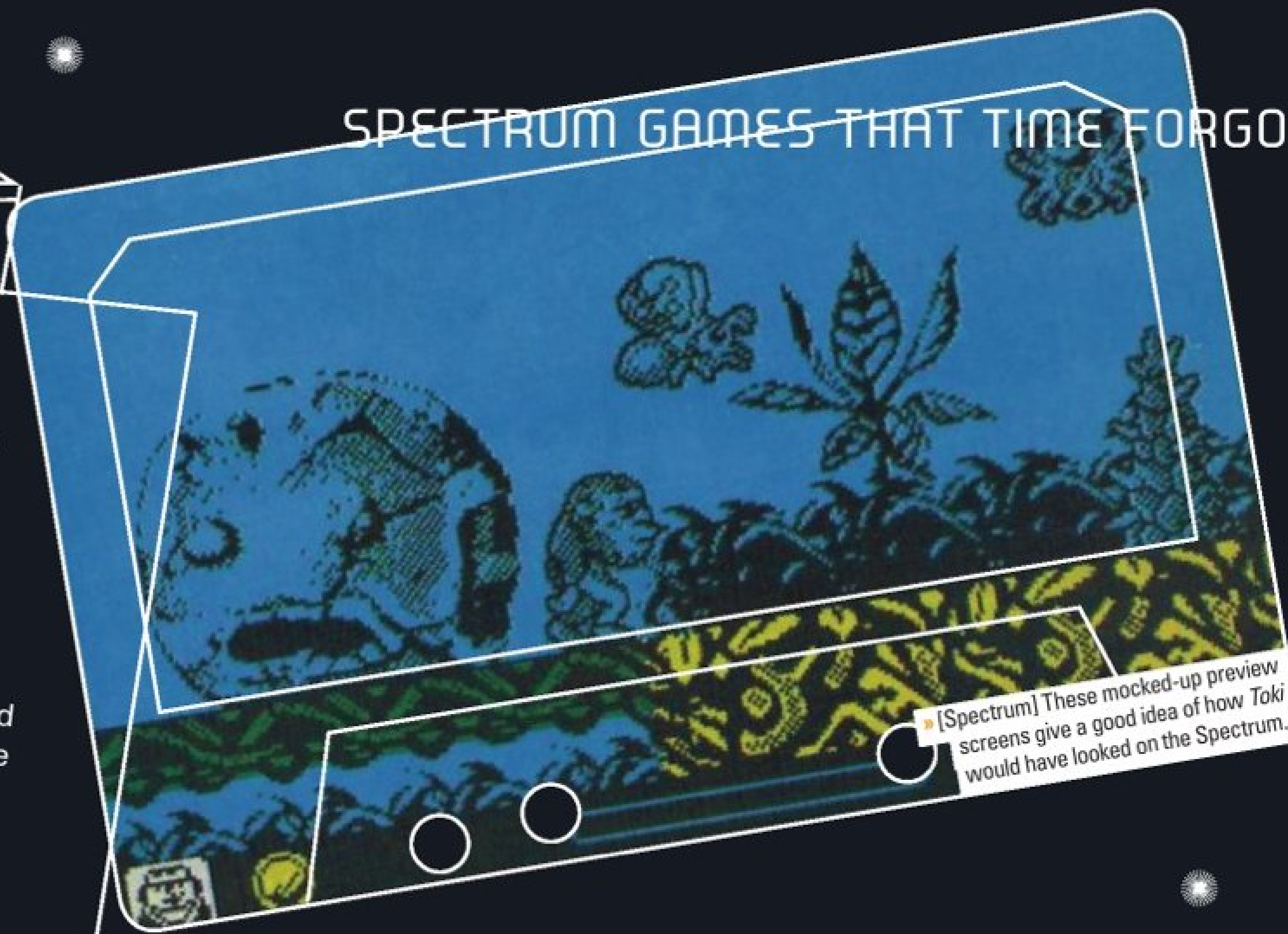
Developer: Ocean
Intended Release Date: August/September 1991

OCEAN'S CONVERSION OF the TAD Corp coin-op failed to swing onto Spectrum 128s despite being heavily advertised and previewed in the magazines of the time. In one of those previews, it was revealed that established coder Dave Looker and his son John were developing the Z80 conversions. It seemed to be shaping up pretty nicely, so what went wrong?

"The main problem was memory," says Dave, who handled the coding while John drew the graphics. "The primary target platform was the Amstrad GX4000, so the game had to fit in a specific cartridge size. This proved to be impossible with the high-resolution sprites that Ocean wanted. We managed to get the first level finished and working in the cartridge, but there was no more space for the other levels, and Ocean would not agree to a larger cartridge size on cost grounds."

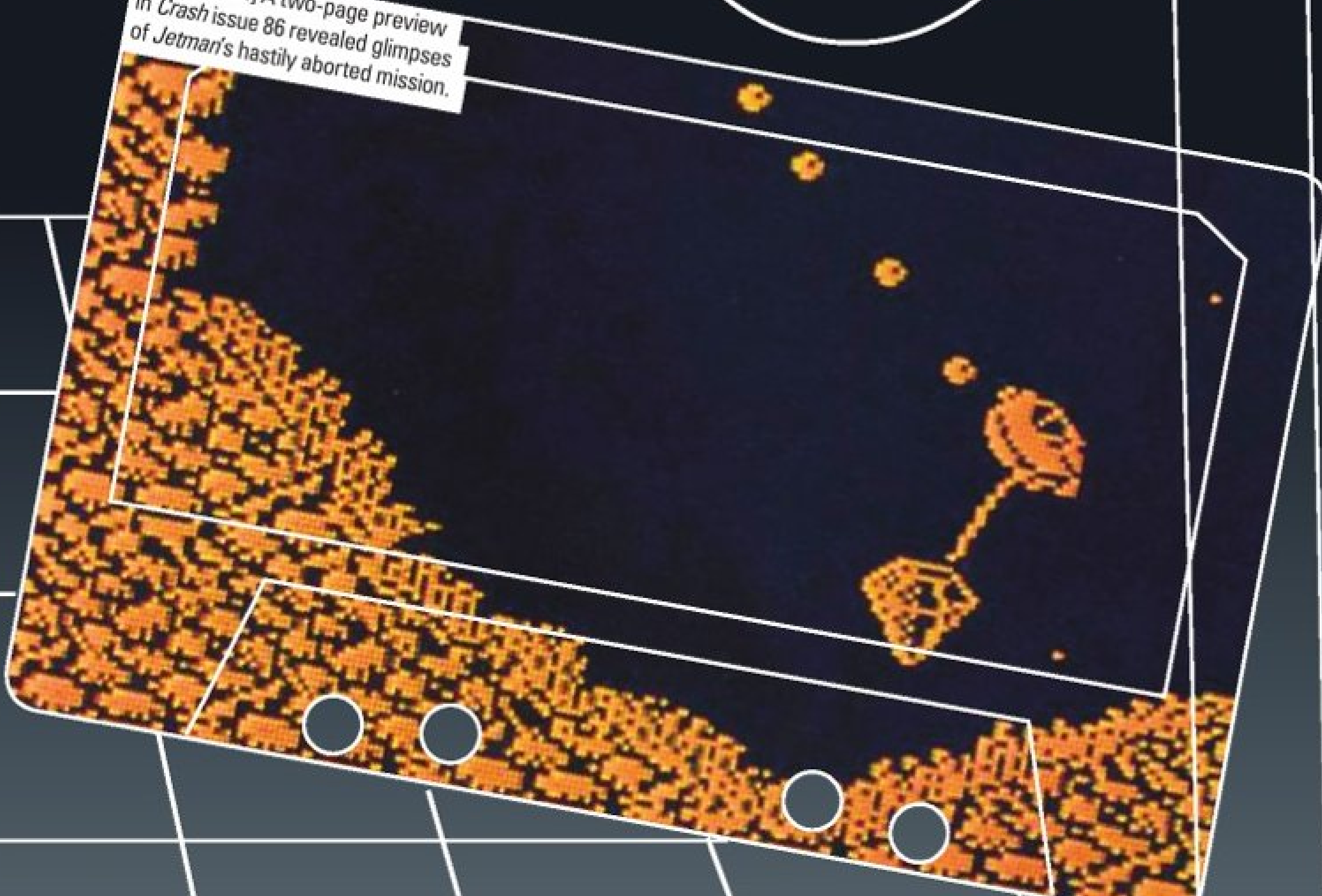
So what about the Spectrum version? At the time, John freely admitted that the Spectrum preview screenshots were mocked up, so was any work done on the game following the cancellation of the Amstrad version? "The Spectrum version was nearly complete," says Dave, to our surprise. "Ocean decided that it wasn't worth releasing, though, probably for political reasons. It was turning out okay but didn't bear comparison with the Amstrad version."

Discovery Prospects: Something may exist. Dave says: "If I get time I could have a search through the boxes of disks at the back of my shed, but as I'm working away in London these days I don't get much time at home." Don't worry – we'll keep pestering him.



[Spectrum] These mocked-up preview screens give a good idea of how *Toki* would have looked on the Spectrum.

> **"I could have a search through the boxes of disks at the back of my shed"**
> – Dave Looker on the prospects of finding Toki



[Spectrum] A two-page preview in *Crash* issue 86 revealed glimpses of *Jetman*'s hastily aborted mission.

SOLAR JETMAN

Developer: Storm
Intended Release Date: April 1991

HAVING DEBUTED ON the NES, Sales Curve announced plans to bring *Jetman*'s third and final outing to home computers. After several months in development, all versions were suddenly and mysteriously cancelled. This was particularly sad for Spectrum owners, as *Jetman* began his career on the Sinclair machine.

The Spectrum version was being coded by Tony Williams and the development was at a fairly advanced stage. He tells us: "We had the main game mechanics all working nicely and the first levels were done and tested. We still had to include and test the data for the later levels, and I suspect sound had not been completed at that point. I don't remember it being a particularly long project. In fact a lot of data and algorithms were supplied to me from the Commodore 64 version."

So what happened? "From my point of view it was just a call telling me to stop work. I was very disappointed. This was a very high-profile game and it was looking like it might be a big success. It was one of those decisions made by a large publisher, which the ordinary programmer finds hard to understand. Publishers have their own reasons – focus groups and marketing departments usually."

At the time it was suggested that the plug was pulled because the 8-bit market was shrinking, yet this doesn't hold up as the ST and Amiga versions were cancelled too. It seems likely that we'll never know the real reason.

Discovery Prospects: The Commodore 64 version has since been recovered, but the news is not so good on the Spectrum front. Asked about any surviving code or assets, Tony said: "I have been asked this a few times recently and the answer is no. If I had a time machine, I would definitely go back and suggest to myself that it was worth keeping hold of."

MINER WILLY MEETS THE TAXMAN

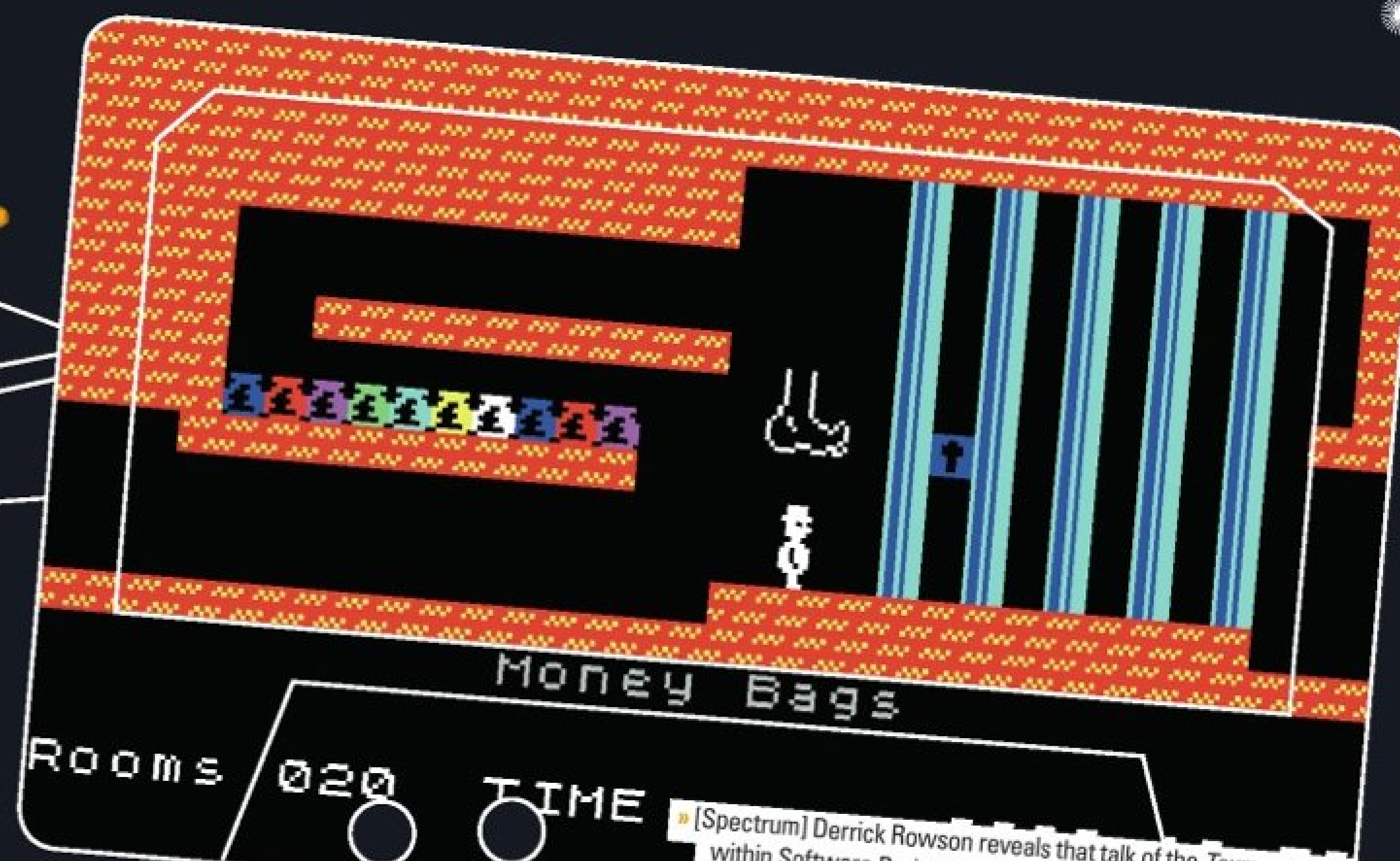
Developer: Software Projects
Intended Release Date: 1984/85

THIS WAS ORIGINALLY thought to be another name for the unreleased C64 game *The MegaTree*, but it has since emerged that *Miner Willy Meets The Taxman* was a separate title in development for the Spectrum. Speaking to Paul Drury in the first **Retro Gamer Anthology**, Matthew Smith said: "*Taxman* was totally different [to *The MegaTree*]. It was a scrolling Spectrum game with platforms. The screen scrolled horizontally, with levels that were more than one screen wide."

It's difficult to determine how much coding Matthew did, but in late 1985, Software Projects boss Alan Maton asked *Jet Set Willy II* author Derrick Rowson to develop the idea. Derrick says: "It was obvious that Matthew was not going to deliver any new games so Alan approached me with the idea of expanding on *Jet Set Willy II*. I started out by writing the code to enable scrolling rooms. The baddies no longer moved on fixed paths and had various levels of intelligence. The main baddies – the taxmen – would chase after Willy and rather than kill him, they would take money from him instead. Willy would have to distract the baddies with money and each level was like a page in his life. The whole idea was whether Willy could reach old age without the taxmen taking all his money."

Derrick worked on the game for about a month and then something rather unexpected happened. "I was instructed to show a 6502 programmer how to code in Z80 and he watched me write the game," he recalls. "The first level was playable and the finer details were being added when my co-worker left suddenly. As he was only really an observer I didn't think it mattered too much, but then Alan appeared at my office door one day and uttered the words: 'STOP! Don't write any more.' The co-worker had shown the work-in-progress code to other software houses as part of his quest for a new job, and as a result the plug was pulled."

Discovery Prospects: The code was stored on a hard drive, which Derrick left behind when he quit Software Projects in 1986. However, we have the name of Derrick's co-worker who sneaked off with the *Taxman* code, so there's a chance he might have kept a copy or shared it with someone else. We're doing our best to try to contact him.



» [Spectrum] Derrick Rowson reveals that talk of the *Taxman* game within Software Projects was the reason why the Money Bags screen was added to Willy's mansion in *JSW: The Final Frontier*.

MIRE MARE

Developer: Ultimate
Intended Release Date: 1987/88

IT'S A QUESTION that still troubles world leaders and great thinkers on a daily basis: what the hell happened to *Mire Mare*? The mythical Sabreman adventure is without doubt the Holy Grail of unreleased Spectrum games.

The Stamper brothers themselves have never spoken about the game, so the next best thing is the brief write-up that appeared on the official 'Rarewhere' website circa 1998. Webmaster Leigh Loveday revealed two golden nuggets of info. The first was that *Mire Mare* was to look and play more like *Sabre Wulf* than *Knight Lore*. The second was that while the basic game design was complete, the actual coding was not. This sounds perfectly plausible, as *Mire Mare* was in development around the time that Ultimate was busy becoming Rare.

Case closed. Or at least it would have been if an anonymous 'ex-Ultimate employee' hadn't gone on record in two separate interviews to say that *Mire Mare* was finished and he'd actually played it. This was the momentous news we'd all been waiting to hear. Unfortunately, the whole story is almost certainly bollocks.

Curious to find out who this mysterious person actually was, we did some digging and discovered his real name. We then contacted some of Ultimate/Rare's longest-serving employees and asked if they recalled working with this person. They didn't, which was pretty surprising, as Ultimate was a small, close-knit company. In addition, a couple of other things about him simply didn't stack up and further undermined his claims.

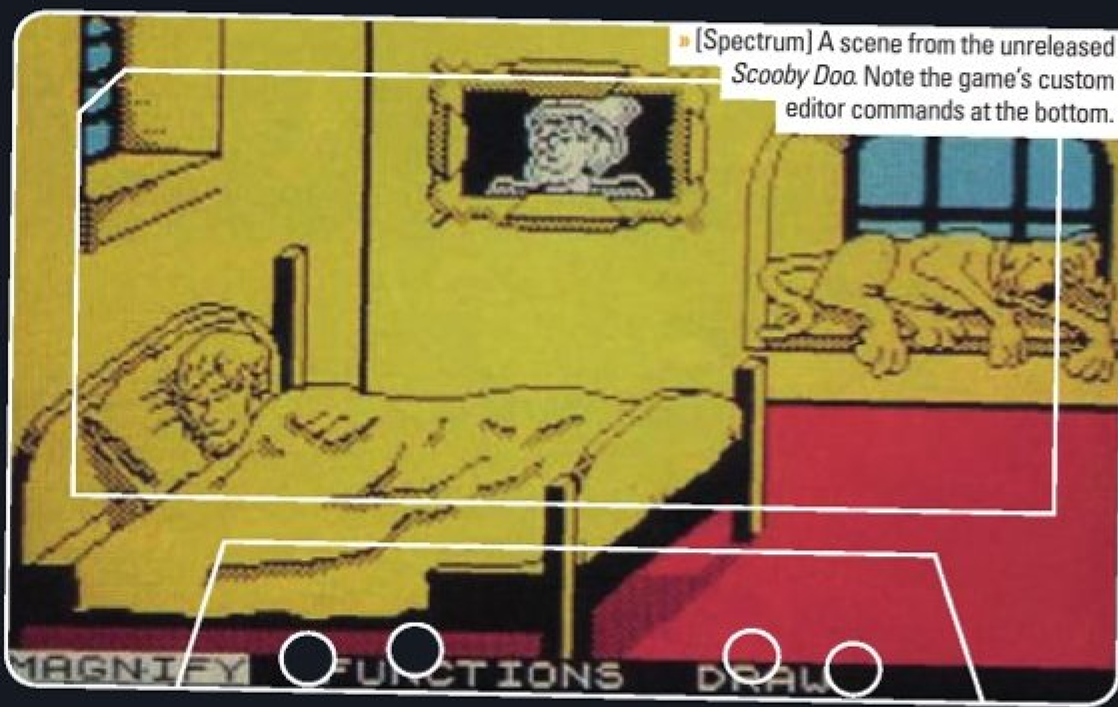
As a result, Leigh's account is the only one we should trust. We recently spoke with Leigh, who still works at Rare, and he told us that no other *Mire Mare* details have come to light in the more than ten years since he first wrote about the game.

Discovery Prospects: We really want to believe that one day *Mire Mare* might become gloriously real, but realistically it's never likely to happen. The best we can hope for are some firm details about the game's design.



» [Spectrum] The game was supposed to hark back to the 2D style of *Sabre Wulf*.

> "The model was Dragon's Lair. Each scene would be its own mini-game" – Richard Wilcox on Scooby Doo



» [Spectrum] A scene from the unreleased *Scooby Doo*. Note the game's custom editor commands at the bottom.

SCOOBY DOO IN THE CASTLE MYSTERY

Developer: Elite Systems
Intended Release Date: 1985

GARGOYLE GAMES DEVELOPED *Scooby Doo* as a platformer for Elite in 1986. Prior to this, Elite fostered hugely ambitious plans to create an interactive 'computer cartoon' based on the property and assembled a small in-house team to come up with something special.

Richard Wilcox, brother of Elite boss Steve, was one of the team. "I designed it, Andy Williams wrote it and John Harrison created some brilliant Scooby animations and backgrounds," he says. "The model was the LaserDisc games such as *Dragon's Lair*. Each scene would effectively be its own mini-game. Rather than hard code each scene, we created an editor, which allowed us to position the characters and define their animations. And it worked a treat. We actually produced about four or five scenes and linked them together. They looked really impressive – huge sprites, lots of *Scooby Doo* humour and a teensy bit of interactivity and gameplay too."

The size and quality of the graphics caused two major problems, however. "Not only was it going to take a lot of time to create the masses of animations required, but if we were going to keep up the standard we'd set in the early scenes, the graphics would also take up a lot of memory, which of course was limited on the Spectrum. Our solution to the memory problem was to force the player to load new scenes as they progressed. And as for the issue of how one person could create so many animations – well, we didn't really have a solution. I think we just wanted it to work so much that we chose to ignore that problem.

"My dad, who ran Elite with my brother, wasn't so keen to bury his head in the sand. When he realised the scope of our ambition and the faint hope we had of achieving it, he made a snap decision there and then and said, 'Rich, on your way back upstairs, will you drop all that *Scooby Doo* stuff in the bin?' I told him just what he could do with himself and walked out, never to return."

And with that, the original plans for *Scooby Doo In The Castle Mystery* were scrappy-dooed. "Maybe we'll all get together one day and finish *Scooby Doo* as it was originally planned," says Richard. "The technology is just about ready for it now!"

Discovery Prospects: The scenes that were completed appear to have been lost forever. But at least in this instance a game did appear, albeit a much more conventional one.



» [Spectrum] Impressive-looking screens from *The Last Ninja* appeared in all of the Spectrum mags.

THE LAST NINJA

Developer: System 3
Intended Release Date: October 1987

LAST NINJA 2 slinked its way onto the Spectrum, but the first game was mysteriously AWOL.

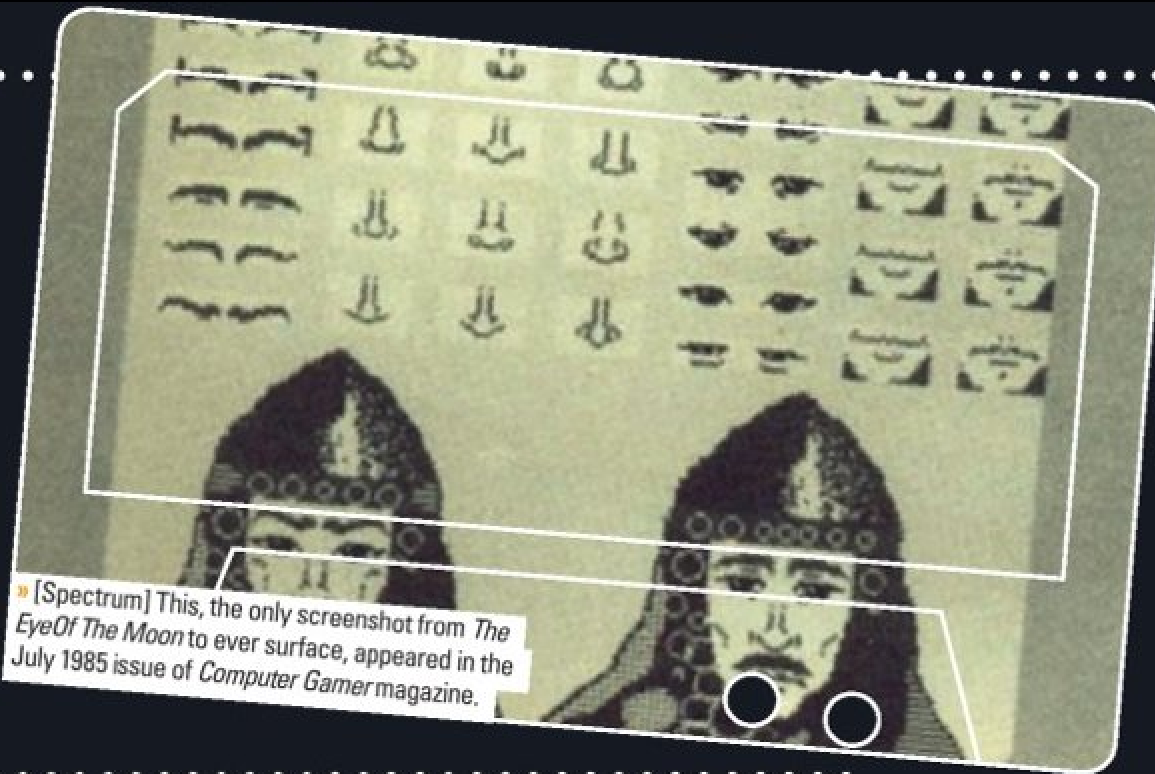
Programmer Mevlut Dinc knows the full story. "The Spectrum conversion was outsourced to a small developer," he recounts. "I believe they spent a lot of time doing it but the end result was not satisfactory for System 3. At the time I had just finished the Amstrad version of *Enduro Racer*, and I was starting to make a name for myself as a good Spectrum and Amstrad programmer. The people at System 3 asked if I could help with *The Last Ninja* on the Spectrum. They told me that they were about to start developing *Last Ninja 2*, and if I could do a quick job on *The Last Ninja* then I could also do the sequel straight after. I had a quick look at what was already there and decided that it was too difficult to rescue the project. So System 3 scrapped *The Last Ninja* and decided that I should develop the Spectrum and Amstrad versions of *Last Ninja 2* from day one alongside the Commodore 64 version."

Last Ninja 3 was also supposedly heading to the Spectrum in 1991, but Mevlut believes that there were never any firm plans to develop the third game for the machine.

Discovery Prospects: Very slim. *Crash* magazine reported that the conversion was "half written" so some code may exist. It was apparently programmed by Phil Churchyard, who also worked on the Spectrum version of *Spindizzy*, but to date we've been unable to track down Phil to find out if anything remains.

BANDERSNATCHED

You're probably wondering why we haven't covered *Bandersnatch*, the infamous Imagine 'mega game' that was to ship with a 256KB ROM add-on packed full of monster-sized sprites. The reason is because two of those involved, Ally Noble and John Gibson, have already spoken about it at length in their Desert Island Disks interviews in **Retro Gamer** issues 53 and 72 respectively, and no additional information has since come to light. If you want to know more, go and grab those back issues!



[Spectrum] This, the only screenshot from *The Eye Of The Moon* to ever surface, appeared in the July 1985 issue of *Computer Gamer* magazine.



"The Eye Of The Moon was to have a bigger map and feature 12 kingdoms"

– Mike Singleton on the final part of Lords Of Midnight

THE EYE OF THE MOON

Developer: Mike Singleton
Intended Release Date: 1985/6

MIKE SINGLETON ALWAYS intended *The Lords Of Midnight* to be a trilogy; *Doomdark's Revenge* and *The Eye Of The Moon* were both mentioned in the manual to the first game. *Doomdark* duly appeared, but *Moon* never made it. As such, we were denied the chance to accompany Morkin on his quest to find the magical jewel of the title in the warmer lands to the south of Midnight.

We spoke to Mike to find out what strange fate befell the third game. "*The Eye Of The Moon* was partly in development following *Doomdark's Revenge*," he says. "In a nutshell, Telecomsoft took over Beyond and wanted to change the terms of the contract so that I personally did the coding for both the Spectrum and the C64 versions but for no more cash than the advance that had already been agreed for just the Spectrum version. I refused and they used their get-out cancellation of contract clause. I always intended to find another publisher for it, but Maelstrom Games was taking up too much time."

Mike's attention was instead occupied by *Dark Sceptre* and *War In Middle-earth*. So what were his plans for *The Eye Of The Moon*? "It was to have an even bigger map – 128 by 128 locations – and I planned for the complete game to feature 12 different kingdoms, with a sub-game to win in each one before you could actually get the Eye itself. There was an actual map, largely generated but hand-coded to give a more realistic feel. I'd also done quite a lot of work on new graphics, which would introduce more variety, so that, for example, each castle would look slightly different to the other castles, allowing you to recognise a place by sight, in theory at least. I had also been working on introducing colour into the landscape itself, using the same sort of masking principles that went into removing colour clash in *Dark Sceptre*."

Later, in 1995, Mike would return to the series with *Lords Of Midnight: The Citadel* for the PC, but this was not the conclusion to the trilogy we'd been waiting for. "*The Citadel* was never intended to be *The Eye Of The Moon*," he stresses. "So, it's still waiting to be done, and one day…"

Discovery Prospects: Unlikely. "As far as I know, nothing exists any more," says Mike. "I did have a colour map printout and I had prototype 'Randscape' graphics running and working, but all of this was still on cassette tape. I kept a large cardboard box full of source code tapes for years and years, but that finally got abandoned when I left England for California. God knows what happened to the paper map."

SABOTEUR 3

Developer: Durell
Intended Release Date: 1988/89

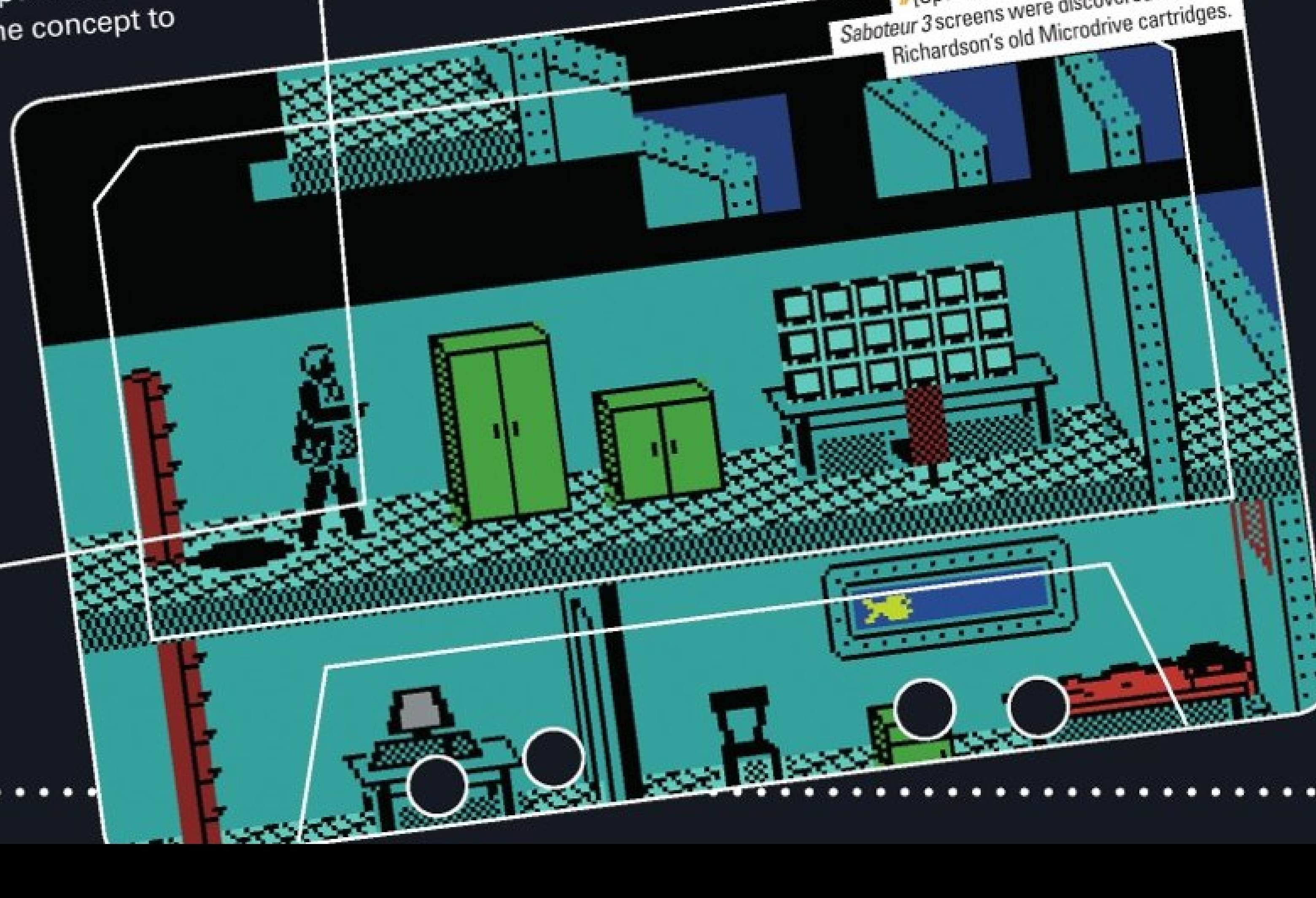
THIS ENTRY IS particularly interesting as there were two separate attempts to release a third *Saboteur* game and neither materialised. The first was being programmed by *Turbo Esprit* author Mike Richardson rather than original *Saboteur* creator Clive Townsend, and the gameplay was to be more linear and puzzle-focused that its predecessors.

Mike remembers: "The game was to be in four parts, each one a separate load. In the first part the character – who I saw as more of a James Bond type agent than a ninja – was dropped on top of a lighthouse by helicopter. He made his way down the lighthouse where there were guards who were more mobile than in previous *Saboteur* games – they went up and down ladders and chased you. Next to the lighthouse there was a science building, and the objective in part one was to get inside. Past the labs you came to the jetty where there was a Jet Ski. Riding the Jet Ski you could, with careful timing, use the waves to jump over mines in the water. On the far side of the bay there was a buoy with the key to the science block. Beyond the first part you needed to get into the labs then down a lift to an undersea base and finally escape in a sub."

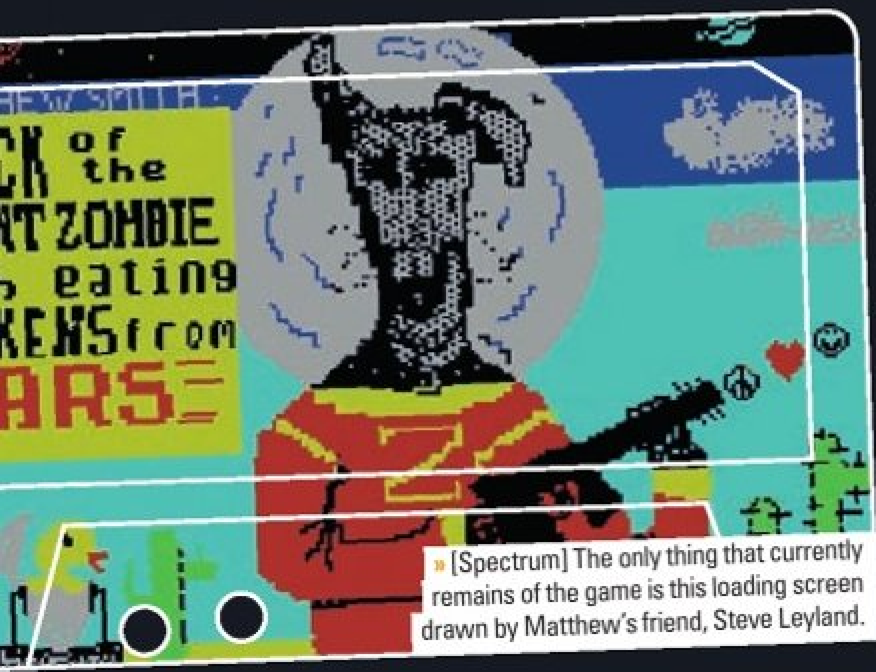
Unfortunately, this promising-sounding game was being worked on in late 1987, at the same time as Durell was in negotiations to sell its gaming catalogue to Elite Systems and move into business software. Mike tells us that the first part was completely finished on the Spectrum and partly done on the C64. As such, the game was neither sold to Elite nor completed by Durell.

A second attempt was later made by Clive Townsend with the title *Saboteur 3D*. The plan was to ditch 2D platforming in favour of a scrolling isometric viewpoint. Clive went as far as producing a Spectrum demo, which has sadly been lost in the intervening years. "It was pretty much just a tech demo," he says. "It was a fighting adventure, with locations like castles and caves, and it used fractal maps to create huge outdoor landscapes." One of Clive's old work disks did throw up a forerunner to *Saboteur 3D* called *Space Ninja*, which he used as an early tech test.

Discovery Prospects: No actual code exists for either Mike's *Saboteur 3* or Clive's *Saboteur 3D*. However, Durell boss Robert White still possesses the original design document to Mike's version and told us: "If you can find a potential publisher I'd be very happy to put the concept to them, subject to a non-disclosure agreement." Clive, meanwhile, remains committed to getting a third *Saboteur* game off the ground after a number of setbacks over the years.



[Spectrum] These work-in-progress *Saboteur 3* screens were discovered on Mike Richardson's old Microdrive cartridges.



» [Spectrum] The only thing that currently remains of the game is this loading screen drawn by Matthew's friend, Steve Leyland.

ATTACK OF THE MUTANT ZOMBIE FLESH EATING CHICKENS FROM MARS

Developer: Software Projects
Intended Release Date: 1987

THIS WAS SUPPOSED to be Matthew Smith's big comeback game. Speaking at the Classic Gaming Expo UK event in 2004, he said: "*Mutant Chickens* had some nice effects, with some really huge sprites overlapping each other without any colour clash. But it never got finished."

The original plan was to create a game based on the *Road Runner* cartoon. Software Projects programmer John Darnell says: "We came up with the idea of doing a *Road Runner* game for the C64. I, and the two artists, started working on it, and as Matthew was not working on anything he was ordered to do a Spectrum version of what I was producing. He got as far as an animated 'That's all, folks!' logo, which was brilliant. The guy really was a genius."

But then they discovered that US Gold had bagged the official *Road Runner* licence. "To avoid legal problems with US Gold, I reworked what I had into *Star Paws* for the C64 and left Matthew to develop something original for the Spectrum. The *Flesh Eating Chickens* name was devised but not much code was written. A dog-type character running along was all that ever got to the screen. Basically, he lost interest. The cassette insert was produced as a means of putting pressure on Matthew to produce something. It didn't work."

Your Sinclair announced in March 1988 that the game had been cancelled.

Discovery Prospects: At CGE UK Matthew said: "There may be something left of it somewhere, but I've had to move with the world in a suitcase on several occasions, and most of it has probably been binned now, to be honest." It seems that the closest you'll get to playing *Mutant Chickens* is *Star Paws*, which was converted from the C64 to the Spectrum by Software Creations in 1988.

GREAT GIANA SISTERS

Developer: Source
Intended Release Date: July 1988

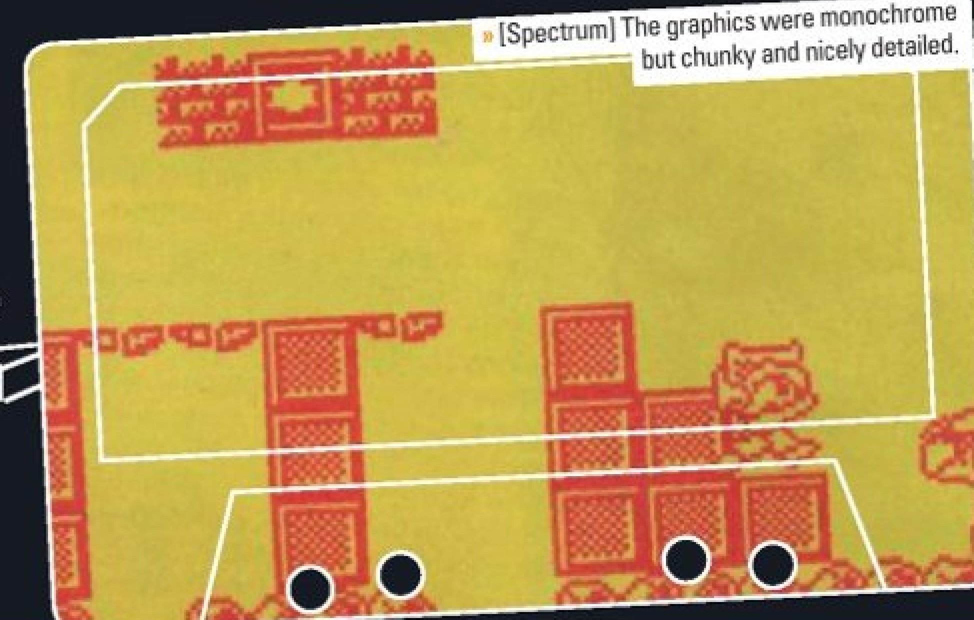
THIS BLATANT *Super Mario Bros* clone appeared briefly on several platforms before being yanked from the shelves by the Big N. At the time of the withdrawal, the Spectrum version had yet to be released, so it was scrapped.

The game was being developed by Source Software. Ian Richards coded it and Chris Gill did the graphics. Source's Ross Harris remembers: "The game was finished when it was cancelled. Certainly all of the levels were converted and the game was playable. It may have been missing some final polish, like a functional high-score table – things that are traditionally done near the end once the game part is complete and pretty much bug-free. It was certainly in a state to show to the magazines and be judged." Indeed, *Crash* awarded the game an impressive 92% review score.

Coder Ian Richards says that the game was cancelled just two days before it was due to be duplicated.

Discovery Prospects: Sadly, none of those involved have kept a copy. Ross says: "I don't have any assets and I doubt anything exists, although I have been surprised before."

» [Spectrum] The graphics were monochrome but chunky and nicely detailed.



LOST... AND FOUND

There's always a chance, however slim, that the games mentioned in this feature might one day be recovered. It's recent discoveries like these that give us hope…

Anaconda

This two-player, top-down shooter in the *Ikari Warriors* mould was due to be published in 1988 by Software Projects. It never appeared, but last year programmer David McGee uncovered his development disks and auctioned them off on eBay. They were won by Steve Brown of the TZX Vault preservation site, who managed to successfully salvage both the 48K and 128K versions of *Anaconda*.



Trojan

Saboteur author Clive Townsend worked on this canned coin-op conversion for Elite around 1987. Clive recently discovered all of his old work disks and these were expertly dumped by Andy Barker of the World of Spectrum preservation team. Although unfinished – only three of the six levels have been done – *Trojan* is perfectly playable and would surely have reviewed well if released.



Joe & Mac

This was another unfinished coin-op conversion that was discovered on Clive Townsend's development disks. Clive produced a playable demo at the request of an associate, who was in negotiations with Nichibutsu about licensing the game, but the deal fell through and it was abandoned. A real shame, as the demo features lovely large sprites and decent use of colour.



THE CLASSIC GAME



SOLOMON'S KEY



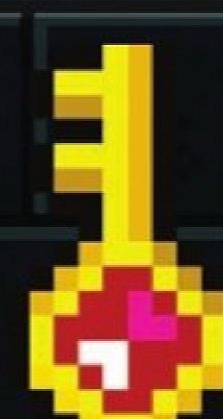
Better known today for a masochistically difficult ninja simulator, a fighting game with flailing boobies and a sexed-up vacation and sports game starring the female characters from said fighting game, it can be easy to forget that Tecmo has a rich coin-op heritage that dates back to the early Eighties. *Solomon's Key* is one of its finest ever classic games, and this month we attempt to explain why.

THE BASICS

DANA

This is the game's hero, an apprentice wizard named Dana. Forgive the girly name, as using his magic wand he can conjure up, or make vanish, rocks that he must use to safely navigate the level.





KEYS

Your first objective in the game is to collect the key that is positioned in an awkward, hard-to-reach area. By hitting them, certain keys can be changed in colour to open up secret rooms.

ENEMIES

Solomon's Key is full of enemies, ranging from cyclopean golems, ghosts and dragons, and all behave differently. To get far in the game you'll need to familiarise yourself with their behaviour.





FAIRIES

Whenever Dana collects a bell pick-up he will summon a fairy to fly around the screen. These serve no real purpose other than that collecting ten of them grants him an extra life.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

WHY IT'S A CLASSIC



All the key components

This wonderful gem is beautiful, addictive, genius in concept and bloody challenging: everything you'd want from a classic puzzle game. Working your way through a series of 48 rooms themed around zodiac signs, your mission is to retrieve a key and then reach the level exit. However, the mission is made considerably more difficult by a large number of traps and monsters that gradually pour in. Completion of a stage relies on clever placement and purging of rocks by your character, Dana. He must use the rocks to get around the playing field and use them as barriers against the monstrous horde.

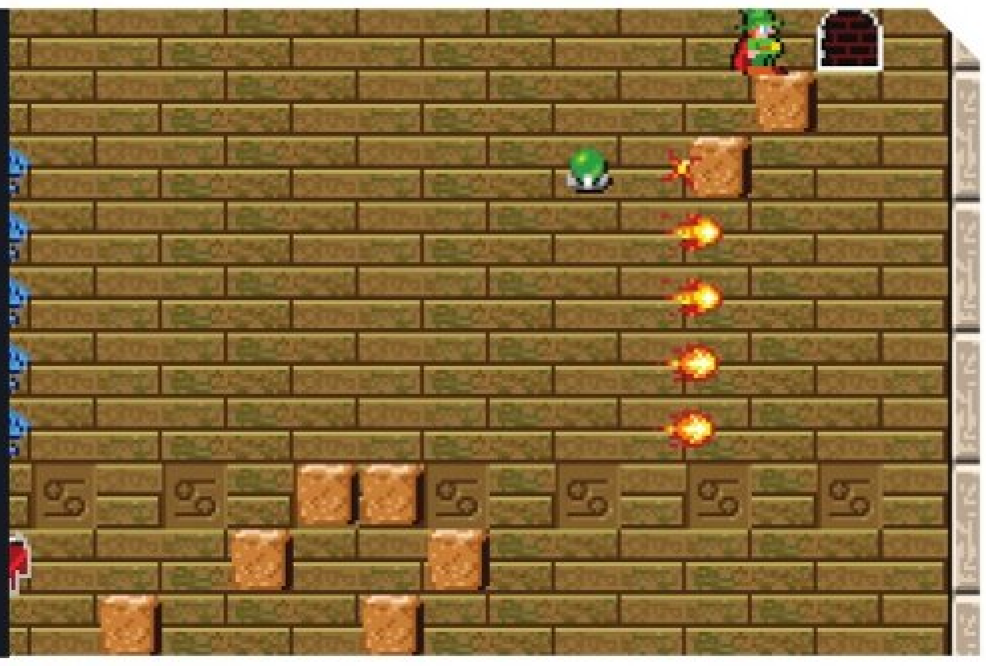
CLONES AND PORTS



Solomon's has his key copied

Like Tecmo's earlier hit, *Bomb Jack*, *Solomon's Key* melded the genres of platformer and puzzle game brilliantly. Both titles were incredibly popular and received a large number of ports. So original was the concept behind *Solomon's Key*, though, that it became the subject of severe cloning as developers tried to put their own spin on it. Clones include *Spherical*, which replaces Dana with a ball, and the arcade and GBA game *Tang Tang*. The latter added a simultaneous two-player mode and had you collecting diamonds to progress to the next room. Neither game touches the original, though.

BEST MOMENT



Exit strategy

Solomon's Key is wonderfully designed and has an almost perfect difficulty curve. With stage completion requiring dexterous rock shuffling and positioning, the game can sometimes seem insurmountable, but perseverance will always see you through. Adding to the challenge, in some rooms your actions can make it impossible to finish the stage, and so it requires you to think a few moves ahead, laying down rocks that will aid you later. The best moment is therefore that second when you finally figure out how to exit a tricky room that has had you perplexed. Nothing beats it.

BEST POWER-UP



Hadoken

Being an apprentice wizard, Dana is severely underpowered. He dies instantly if he comes into contact with an enemy and is unable to repel them with his magic wand. Potion power-ups bestow Dana with the ability to launch a fireball that travels along the surface of the level for a short period, killing any enemy it touches. Without these, the only other way to kill an enemy is to smash rocks beneath to cause them to plummet to the ground – and sometimes even then, if the fall is too slight, this doesn't work. With rooms gradually filling with enemies, though, fireballs are generally best used defensively.

SOLOMON'S SEQUELS



He emigrated to Nintendo

Solomon's Key received a number of sequels on Nintendo machines. The first, *Solomon's Club*, released on the Game Boy, kept to the same formula, repurposing many of the enemies but adding a few new handy power-ups to the mix, such as water pistols to extinguish flames. A prequel, *Solomon's Key 2* (*Fire 'N Ice* in the US), was then released for the Famicom, this time with Dana generating, melting and kicking ice blocks to extinguish the flames on screen and progress. Tecmo also later released a Game Boy Color version of the game starring characters from its *Monster Rancher* series.

SOLOMON'S SECRETS



Shh! It's a secret!

Another aspect that really makes *Solomon's Key* so enjoyable is that it features a large number of secrets to find. Many rooms featured concealed pick-ups that would be dropped by defeated enemies or only become visible if Dana placed or destroyed a rock on a particular area of the screen. In addition, there was also a series of secret rooms. Unlocked by casting a spell over certain keys in the game, this would change their colour to blue, and then, when Dana walked through, the exit would lead him to a bonus room, adding more challenge and also the chance to earn more points.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- **PUBLISHER:** TECMO
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1986
- **GENRE:** PUZZLE

What the press said… ages ago



Zzap!64 86%

"An original, satisfying and addictive variation of the platform theme."

Crash

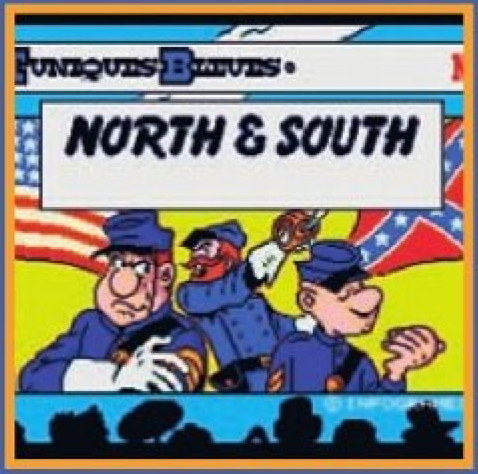
"The graphics are well-defined, the animation is good and there's plenty of playability. The idea of dodging nasties and collecting keys may not seem too exciting but I assure you you'll be addicted in a second."

What we think

Solomon's Key is a bona fide classic with some fantastic home conversions – always a mark of a game with incredibly tight, original and addictive gameplay. The game hasn't aged either and is just as enjoyable today as it was back in the day.

NORTH &

A Belgian comic based on the American Civil War, a fledgling French developer and one of the best-loved games of the Amiga era. Mike Bevan talks to creator Stéphane Baudet about the game that put Infogrames on the map



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** INFOGRAMES
- » **DEVELOPER:** INFOGRAMES
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **PLATFORMS:** AMIGA, ATARI ST, C64, ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC, NES, PC, MSX
- » **GENRE:** ACTION/STRATEGY



When we think of comic book characters in videogames, it's easy for thoughts to wander across the Atlantic, from Mickey Mouse in *Castle Of Illusion* to *Marvel Vs. Capcom* and the various gaming outings of Spider-man, X-Men and The Hulk. It's worth remembering, though, that Europe has a long tradition of comic creations that have made the transition from brush-stroke to pixels. For example, pint-size Gaul Asterix, quiffed adventurer Tintin, and our very own Dan Dare all made it into their own videogames in the Eighties and Nineties. Back in the day, those who played *North & South* might not have realised that its roots also lay in a popular European comic series.

North & South pulls off the impressive feat of taking a turbulent period of American history, the Civil War of 1861-65, and turning it into a entertaining action-strategy game with a healthy dose of unmistakably Gallic humour. Played out across a stylised map of the Eastern and Midwestern (then not so) United States, the game alternates between board-game style strategy, miniature real-time combat and arcade-style platform sections. It's a winning hybrid of styles, particularly in two-player mode, the battlefield sections proving a real highlight as players frantically try to demolish their opponent with tiny cannons, cavalry and troops.

The lead programmer of *North & South* was Stéphane Baudet, who joined Lyon-based developer Infogrames in 1988. "My first job as programmer was to develop a game called *Hostages* on the Amiga," Stéphane recalls. "After that, I proposed to take over a game that was abandoned due to the departure of team members. The game was based on *Les Tuniques Bleus*, a Franco-Belgian comic book. *Les Tuniques Bleus* was not very popular outside of France, Belgium and Switzerland. I don't actually know if the comic was distributed in other countries such as UK and Germany. Personally, I read the comic when I was a kid and I was already familiar with the universe."

"Infogrames' management team (Bruno Bonnell and Thomas Schmider) were fans of European

LES TUNIQUES BLUES

THE COMIC STRIP that inspired *North & South* originally appeared in a Belgian weekly comic called *Spirou*, and was named after the famous Bluecoats of the Northern States during the Civil War. The first comic book album, *Un Chariot Dans l'Ouest*, was published in 1970 and the series has now run to 54 issues, becoming one of the most popular comics in the French language. It follows the adventures of two unlikely heroes of the Union army - Corporal Blutch, a sarcastic and reluctant soldier, and the headstrong and patriotic Sergeant Cornelius M. Chesterfield. The series has seen them taking part in several battles and meeting historical characters like Abraham Lincoln, General Grant and Robert. E. Lee. After many years of only being available in their native French, four volumes of the series were recently translated into English by publisher Cinebooks.



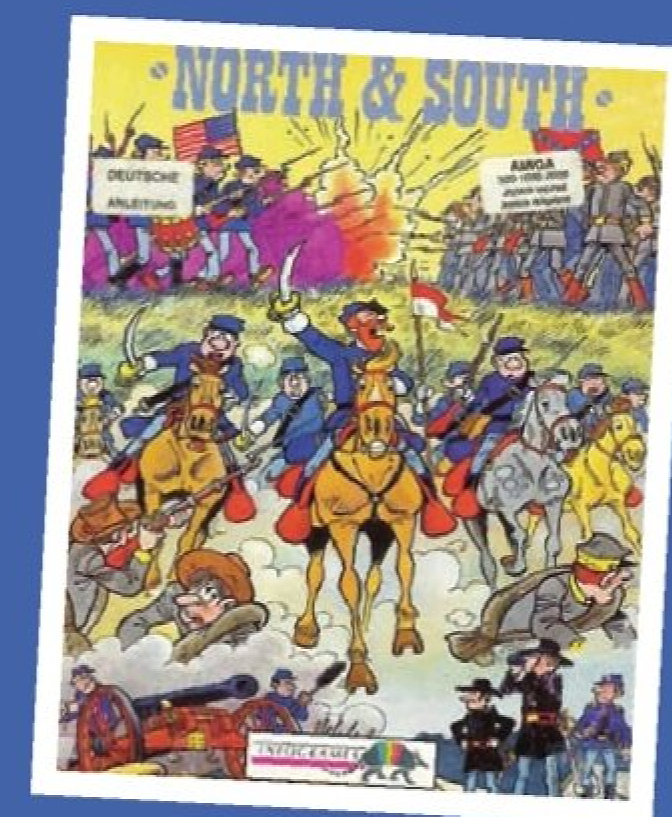
SOUTH

comics, and the company had made cross-media between comics and videogames a significant element of the company strategy," reveals Stéphane. "Before *North & South*, Infogrames had already adapted a couple of comic universes as games, even if they were pretty unknown in many European countries. The first Infogrames game published [*Passengers On The Wind*] was based on the comic *Les Passagers Du Vent*. At the time, the company didn't have the money to buy more famous comics licenses such as *Astérix* or *Tintin*. Although *Les Tuniques Bleus* was well-known in French-speaking territories, it was especially for the humour and richness of its universe that it was chosen."

The real-time battles of *North & South* are triggered when Union and Confederate forces meet on the map, instigating a switch to a bird's eye view of the action. These evolved early in the game's development, influenced by Stéphane's interest in traditional table-top war gaming and the skirmishes pictured in the comic series. "Ever since I was a kid, I was fan of the little plastic toy soldiers, and I wanted to create a game based on small-sized soldiers fighting each other in real time," he says. "The RTS genre did not exist at that time, so there were barely any existing reference games. The American Civil War context of *Les Tuniques Bleus* was the perfect setting to try out this idea."

Although *North & South* shares certain similarities with previous videogames like *Defender Of The Crown* and *Archon*, board games rather than contemporary videogames were the main impetus behind the strategy portion of the game. "I was particularly interested by the genre, regularly playing war games at the time," Stéphane tells us. "I played *Civilization* and *Defender Of The Crown*, but the real inspiration was *Risk*. *Civilization* was a far more complex game, and the strategy level of *Defender Of The Crown* was a bit limited. The *Risk*/action game hybrid actually came from technical limitations. Initially, what I wanted to do was to have just one view to see all the troops and control them from the top, like a modern RTS game. But technically, that was not possible so I went for the hybrid form, which probably made the game a success."

Indeed, the slightly hotchpotch nature of *North & South* certainly adds to its charm. One minute you're musing over the tactical map like an armchair General Grant, wondering which part of the Confederacy to waltz your armies into, the next you're robbing a train or capturing a fort, slugging guards skywards, *Asterix*-style. The task of creating the various sub-sections of the game was shared between Stéphane and several other programmers on the Infogrames team. "I worked mainly on the battlefield gameplay," says Stéphane. "The strategic section



» *North & South*'s original European box-art features an attractive montage of Willy Lambil's comic-book artwork.

"Odd and (in the two player mode) simply unmissable" AMIGA POWER



» [NES] Explosive boxes, dogs and knife-throwing guards hinder our plucky rampart-leaping hero.



NORTH & SOUTH

(US map) was developed by a programmer called Vincent Belliard, who later developed the engine of one of the first French internet portals called Infonie."

"Personally, I was not such an excellent programmer as Vincent, because I was only interested in the result, not in how the code was built. As a consequence, I had things running quite quickly, but I was spending an awful lot of time trying to debug it… The side-scrolling mini-games were the only piece I kept from the original game prototype when I took over the project. Initially, I was not a big fan of those gameplay sections – I found them a bit lame and repetitive – but since significant work was already done on those, we all decided to keep them to break the routine of the battlefield gameplay."

Those who have played against in computer in *North & South* will know it plays a mean game, particularly at the more advanced levels. Another fun aspect is the fact your computer can be set up to quite happily play its own fictionalised Civil War against itself. "I have always been a big fan of multiplayer games, and *North & South* was created as a two-player game," says Stéphane. "The AI was developed to replace the second player. We actually even had a mode in which the two players were replaced by AI bots. This mode was used to debug the game, and tune the balancing of battlefield units and the strategic level. We were just leaving the Amiga running the game all night and sometimes we were coming back in the morning to discover that a cavalry unit was left invincible and stuck in a bush!"

Despite not featuring much in the way of a narrative, the visual style of *North & South* is admirably close to that of the comic books, down to the tongue-in-cheek 'cover' on the title screen. "I remember that we met with Willy Lambil (the artist of *Les Tuniques Blues*) in our office," says Stéphane. "We showed him the progress of the game and what the graphics looked like on Atari ST or Amiga. He was amazed to see his characters in movement because Chesterfield and Blutch (the two main heroes) were animated for the first time. Didier Chamfray, our Art director, did a really good job of conveying the art style of Willy Lambil on the Atari and Amiga versions, though, for the 8-bit versions, the colour and sprite limitations imposed a lot of interpretation on the original style."

"With the character design, the humour was the second key element of the comic universe. The sense of humour directly derivates from the comic, and because we all liked that sort of humour, it was kind of natural and easy for us to convey it in the game. Didier Chamfray was the 'funny man' of the team, and he brought most of the humorous touches to the game (images, animations, silly sound effects…). The idea of poking the photographer actually came from Frederic Raynal, who later created *Alone In The Dark*. He wasn't part of the team, but he was a big supporter of the game, and was coming to us regularly with all sorts of crazy ideas!"

The whimsical spirit of the comics permeates throughout the game via an assortment of funny moments – the sound of cavalry falling into a river with a whinny and a splash, injuns chucking hatchets across the map, and humorous versions of 'Yankee Doodle' and other traditional American tunes. "The final mix of the game (humour, strategy and action) wasn't calculated, and was just a combination of the heritage of the early stage of the project and the mix of personalities involved. This mix was certainly the key factor to the success of the game, along with its accessibility and endless replayability. We enjoyed playing the game frequently ourselves, and we were constantly improving many details of the game as we did so."

"The success really started when North & South was released in the UK and Germany"



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DRAKKHEN
SYSTEM: AMIGA, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1990

THE SMURFS
SYSTEM: PSONE
YEAR: 1999

ASTERIX (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: SNES
YEAR: 1993

V-RALLY
SYSTEM: PSONE
YEAR: 1997



CONVERSION CAPERS

We compare the various computer and console versions with which to lead the Union to victory…

AMIGA/ATARI ST
The Amiga and Atari versions are the ones we'd recommend to potential *North & South* generals. While practically identical, the ST actually has even better digitised sound effects and jingles than the already excellent Amiga version.



COMMODORE 64
Probe Software's conversion tries its hardest, but disappointing visuals and awkward loading times (for each section the game) put the dampeners on this port. The disk version is just about playable, but the cassette one is a bit of a nightmare.



ZX SPECTRUM
On the Spectrum 128 this is by far the best of the 8-bit computer versions, with admirable graphics, a very playable battlefield section and arcade sub-games. The 48K version suffers from the same multi-load problems as the C64 port.





» [Atari ST] Despite the tiny sprites, the intense battles are captured perfectly.



The fact that *North & South* was a relatively complex game for its time didn't stop it being ported from the more powerful 16-bit platforms to the lowly 8-bit computers, as well as a receiving a rather good version on the NES console. "The original versions are the Atari ST and the Amiga," says Stéphane. "The other versions were just created on the success of the Atari and Amiga versions and developed in parallel by the same team. The Commodore 64 version was developed by Probe Software, based in Croydon. The Spectrum version was made in Spain by a developer called Bit Managers."

"The ZX Spectrum and Amstrad CPC Cassette versions were probably the most awkward," confides Stéphane. "Every gameplay section (the battlefield, the train, the fort) was recorded on a side of a cassette. I remember that the game had something like three double-sided cassettes in the box and you constantly had to rewind and switch cassettes while playing… But even with this issue, the game received 96 per cent in *Crash* magazine!"

North & South turned out to be an important title for the struggling Infogrames, despite a slow start in its homeland. "The early reception was mild," admits Stéphane. "The game came out first in France and the reviews were average. The scores were maybe affected by Infogrames' poor image in France at that time. We were mostly known for selling cheap or unpolished games in pretty boxes. The popularity of the game grew progressively, and the success really started when the game was released in the UK and Germany. Reviews in most European countries were in the region of 85-95 per cent, which was really good compared to the French reviews."

The game's eventual success allowed Infogrames to persue the rights to other comic book series it had interests in, including *Asterix*, *Tintin* and even *The Smurfs*, establishing itself as the premiere developer for European comic book licensed videogames. Stéphane worked on *The Smurfs* and two *Asterix* videogames himself, before leaving and founding Eden Games, where he produced the successful *V-Rally* series for Infogrames. Eden most recently brought us both instalments of the *Test Drive Unlimited* series, and, in an extraordinary reversal of fortune, Infogrames has grown from early projects like *North & South* to purchasing the hallowed Atari label.

Stéphane is now Creative director at Ubisoft Annecy, specialising in multiplayer games. His most recent project was directing the critically acclaimed multiplayer mode in *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood.* "It was really nice two-year collaboration with the Ubisoft's Montreal Studio," he comments. "The reception seems to be good for the moment, and we will now keep improving the game and provide additional content until the next *Assassin's Creed* iteration."

For us at **Retro Gamer**, it's gratifying to know that the man behind one of the most innovative multiplayer experiences of recent years cut his teeth with the whimsically endearing two-player battles of an Amiga classic "It was really my first game, and it remains one of my favourite games I've worked on in my long career," he says. "Today I regularly teach in school and many students make references to it, such as: 'Wahoo… you are the guy behind *North & South*!' So, if I can be remembered for just a couple of games, *North & South* would be one of them."

CONVERSION CAPERS CONTINUED

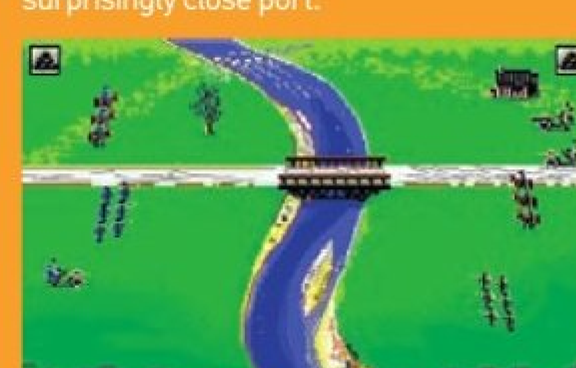
AMSTRAD CPC

A very respectable port, despite a rather garish look about it in some parts of the game (no wonder the South lost if their forts were bright pink). It's fast and playable, and there are no loading times between the various minigames.



PC DOS

Being released back in the days of primitive sound and video cards means this conversion is a bit of an assault on the ears, and nowhere near as pretty as the Amiga and ST versions, but it's otherwise a surprisingly close port.



NES

We're big fans of the NES version; despite the graphics being simplified, they have a cute 'Nintendo-ified' look to them that's quite endearing, and it plays wonderfully on the NES pad – with the fort and train sections being particularly good fun.



IMPORT ONLY

GAME ORIGIN



» **COUNTRY:** JAPAN
» **POPULATION:** 127,433,494
» **CAPITAL:** TOKYO
» **NATIONAL LANGUAGE:** JAPANESE
» **CURRENCY:** YEN
» **TIME ZONE:** GMT +9

» **CO-ORDINATES:** 35°41' N 139°46' E

INFO



» **PUBLISHER:** ENIX
» **DEVELOPER:** ALMANIC
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES
» **ALSO ON:** N64 (SEQUEL)
» **GENRE:** RAISING SIM
» **RELEASED:** 1994
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** ¥780 YEN

PRICE WATCH

▲ **More expensive than**



E.V.O SEARCH FOR EDEN
GET IT FOR: **£50 UNBOXED**
Also developed by Almanic but released prior to *Wonder Project J*, this evolution sim on the SNES was localised for the US, and now fetches high prices even unboxed. Not surprising, since as well as being very unusual, it's quite excellent.

▼ **Less expensive than**



TAMAGOTCHI
GET IT FOR: **COUPLE OF QUID**
We once owned a Tamagotchi, and we expressed our love for him through food. Punishment was also expressed through more food. Our precious little baby ended up getting so big he never wanted to leave home! More gravy, junior?

WONDER PROJECT J

» Having children is a moment of pleasure for the man, hours of labour pain for the woman, and a lifetime of responsibility for the two afterwards. John Szczepaniak is adamant his family name dies with him, but in the meantime he finds digital raising sims curiously fascinating…

The origin of the 'raising sim' is difficult to determine, but it can probably be traced to *Little Computer People* in 1985. A rather nebulous term, it has actually encompassed several genres over the years. Although arguably originating in the West, much like the RPG the Japanese took the idea and redefined it into something special, distinct from the subsequently more popular, serious simulations that cropped up. Why the Japanese took so readily to the concept back in the genre's early days is a sociological topic beyond the scope of these two pages, but they've produced dozens of fantastic examples, the majority of which were never localised. One of the best and longest-running is the *Princess Maker* series, mixing the logistics of raising a daughter with complex stat management and RPG combat and exploration. More popular Japanese examples which reached the West include Sega's use of A-Life management in *NiGHTS* and Chao-raising in *Sonic Adventure*, as well as the Tamagotchi toy, *Pokémon* and *Nintendogs* to name a further three – all diverse examples, but with the unifying trait of caring for something.



» [SNES] The story is very dark in places. Here the king wants to sentence our boy to death due to him being a Gijin.

Wonder Project J by Almanic is in many ways similar to *Princess Maker*. In this case, you're looking after a young robot boy (known as a Gijin) instead of a daughter, and teaching him what it means to be human. Named by the player, he has 16 personality stats in addition to stress, health and energy. Each stat falls under either Aggression, Athleticism, Intelligence or Sensitivity, with each augmented by repeating specific actions. And just like in the *Princess Maker* games, different actions will raise some stats while lowering others (kicking a football is great for leg power, but lowers intelligence).

In purely mechanical terms, *Wonder Project J* controls more like a traditional point-and-click adventure. Where it differs is that, instead of zany logic puzzles, progress is staggered by situations which require the boy learn a particular skill (such as balancing on a ball) in addition to having the stats to perform it. Learning something requires practice, praising him when he does it correctly and scolding when wrong. So if you want to get a hole-



» [SNES] These red spark balls can be defeated easily using either of the available swords.



» [SNES] The visuals are gorgeous, making good use of the SNES's diverse colour palette.



» [SNES] You have no direct control during arena fights, so it's all down to training.

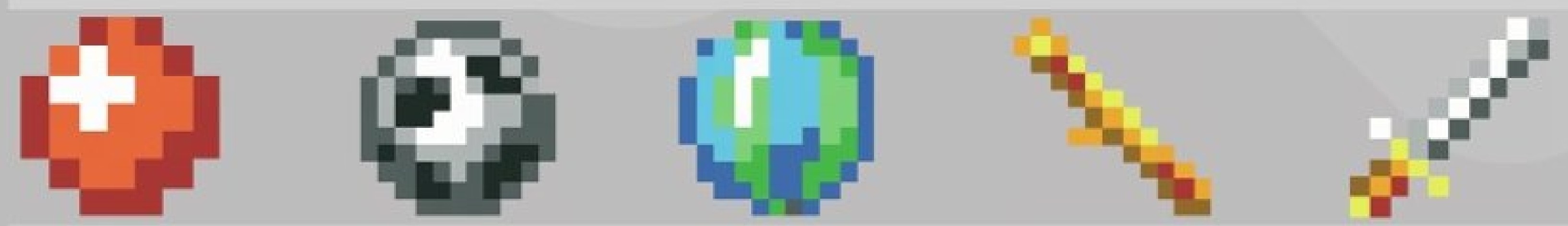
in-one at the golf tournament, you need to buy a club and practice his swing, then bring out the weights to build arm strength.

The praise-and-scold mechanic is brilliantly implemented, since the boy has a personality of his own and will cause mischief until you correct him. Until he's taught proper etiquette he's quite likely to shred his grammar book and attempt to eat the cat. Later on there are ingenious moments where you need to 'unteach' various actions, by scolding the poor fellow for doing something previously taught as correct. For example, whereas an early task requires he masters ball-throwing, later on he needs to unlearn this otherwise he'll throw it at a policeman with disastrous results. Each situation is still a puzzle, as you'd expect in a point-and-click, except completion requires setting up domino pieces for a desired effect. You can retry failed attempts (Game Overs are rare), and success proves immensely satisfying.

GO DEEPER – ITEMS

A selection of items you'll find in the game, and how they can be used. Stop by the town store often!

- » Practice throwing the ball
- » Football increases leg strength
- » Balance on the circus ball
- » Forget the stick; get a sword
- » The silver sword is good and cheap



- » Strong blue sword uses energy
- » Green grammar book for reading
- » Blue encyclopaedia for intelligence
- » This bad book makes you mean
- » Use the hoe before farming



- » Seeds grow crops for selling
- » Practice golf for a hole-in-one
- » Weights increase muscle
- » A box for lock-picking
- » Play music at the harbour



- » Health potions to raise HP to 500
- » Eat energy batteries when exhausted
- » Pudding restores trust
- » Confidence potion for the timid
- » Sleeping aid for the restless



> **"Until he's taught proper etiquette he's quite likely to shred his grammar books and attempt to eat the cat"**

Graphically it's exquisite, and could be the best on the SNES. Backgrounds are hand-drawn and characters have an abundance of animation. It's also cinematic, with plenty of beautiful cut-scenes which feel reminiscent of Osamu Tezuka's *Astroboy*. The game manages to foster genuine emotion for the Gijin child; you want him to do well and, when he bests the competition at sport or swordplay, there's a feeling of pride.

For those worried the game is too light-hearted, it actually has some dark undertones. For the last 50 years, humans and Gijin have lived uneasily together, with increasing bigotry directed at the robots. Humans sympathetic to Gijin are arrested, several on both sides are murdered, and the King even orders our boy sentenced to death because of his origin. Dark stuff indeed, and combined with the unusual gameplay it's unsurprising this was never localised.

Thankfully, it was fan-translated in 2001, and should be familiar enough even for those who've never dabbled in raising sims. There are numerous such games currently available, many in English and many worth playing; the first *Wonder Project* offers an excellent beginner's entry, coupled with a zany slice of Japanese styling.

CAN'T IMPORT? YOU COULD TRY



PRINCESS MAKER 2 (DOS)

» We could have put *Spore* here, but nothing says hardcore like playing the officially localised, leaked version of *Princess Maker 2* for DOS. Tasked with raising a girl from the age of ten to adulthood, you decide what she studies and where she works, be it the fields, cabaret or hairdresser. Alternatively train her as a warrior, mage or chef. It also features RPG overworlds to explore and 74 endings!

#07 Smash T.V.



This month we give you the complete lowdown on Smash T.V. – William's punishing semi-sequel to Robotron: 2084 and one of videogames' loudest cacophonies of colours, bullets and gunishment

Instant Expert

Smash T.V. was released into arcades in 1990 and is the semi-sequel to Williams Electronics' 1982 classic *Robotron 2084*.

Smash T.V. was the first videogame John Tobias worked on. The comic artist turned game designer is most famous for being the co-creator of *Mortal Kombat*.

The game's host was based on a portmanteau of the announcer from *The Running Man* and the character Bixby 'I'd buy that for a dollar' Snyder from *RoboCop*.

Smash T.V. took 15 months to make, and several features had to be dropped because of deadlines, chief among them the fabled Pleasure Domes. Basically just a prize room entered ahead of the final boss fight, one was retrofitted to SNES update *Super Smash T.V.*

The game features nods to a number of old Williams' games, including *Sinistar* and Eugene's own 1980 smash *Defender*.

The sequel *Total Carnage* didn't follow on directly from *Smash T.V.*, and was a departure from the arena shooter genre. It detailed the story of two soldiers tasked with toppling an evil dictator.

At one stage *Smash T.V. 2* was considered but sadly never got past planning stage.

The PSP's *GTA: Liberty City Stories* features a side-mission that lampoons *Smash T.V.*

With the likes of *Defender* and *Robotron: 2084* on his resume, Eugene Jarvis is someone who clearly doesn't program pushovers. And his 1990 arcade hit *Smash T.V.* certainly didn't shy away from serving up players a diamond-encrusted challenge, either – its title is actually a pretty clear warning as to the unusually high level of punishment contained in its gameplay.

As fans of twin-stick shooters should be fully aware, *Smash T.V.* is the spiritual sequel to Eugene and Larry DeMar's seminal 1982 twitch-shooter *Robotron: 2084*, a game that drew inspiration from a number of sources, among them the Stern Electronics game *Berzerk*. A fan of *Berzerk*, Jarvis sought to put his own unique stamp on the gameplay. He and Larry distilled the action by splitting the gameplay into open arenas rather than mazes, making each its own Battle of the Alamo-style fight for survival, and fused a subtle element of strategy to proceedings by incorporating a secondary – but not imperative – goal that saw players earning extra points if they managed to rescue a hapless family caught up in the crossfire.

Most notably though, they integrated an ingenious twin-joystick control scheme to the game that enabled players to move their avatar using one eight-way joystick and fire in eight directions using another, enabling easy and immediate blasting of the robot menace, and making *Robotron* intuitive to control and instantly playable.

When Mark Turmell and John Tobias came to Eugene with an idea of creating a game based on *Robotron's* twin-joystick controls several years later, how to best approach the project was a daunting prospect for the team. Too much time had passed since *Robotron*'s release, and gamers and their tastes had changed dramatically. It was therefore decided that a spin-off would be the best course of action, and the result was *Smash T.V.*

Smash T.V. changed very little of *Robotron*'s formula. The action remained arena-based, and *Robotron*'s immediate and inspired twin-stick controls were also carried across. However, to view *Smash T.V.* as a simple facsimile of *Robotron* with fancier updated graphics would be a huge injustice.

Smash T.V. enlivened *Robotron*'s gameplay in a number of ways. It benefited greatly by introducing power-ups, a variety of weapons for players to wield, gargantuan bosses with multiple attacks and a high level of graphic feedback, and by also adding an element of teamwork and competition by enabling two players to work together to complete the game while competing to pick up the most prizes.

That *Smash T.V.* was developed as a spin-off to *Robotron* also allowed the team the freedom to conjure up an entirely new scenario to base the action around. Dropped was the robot invasion setting, and replacing it was one that connected brilliantly with the spirit of

Pixel Perfect

We'd buy the cast of Smash T.V. for a dollar…



» Purple Cobra » Green Grunt » Lightning Orb » Red Mr Shrapnel » Snake » Standard Gun



» Scarface » Purple Snake Man » Host » Mine » Gunner » Orbiters



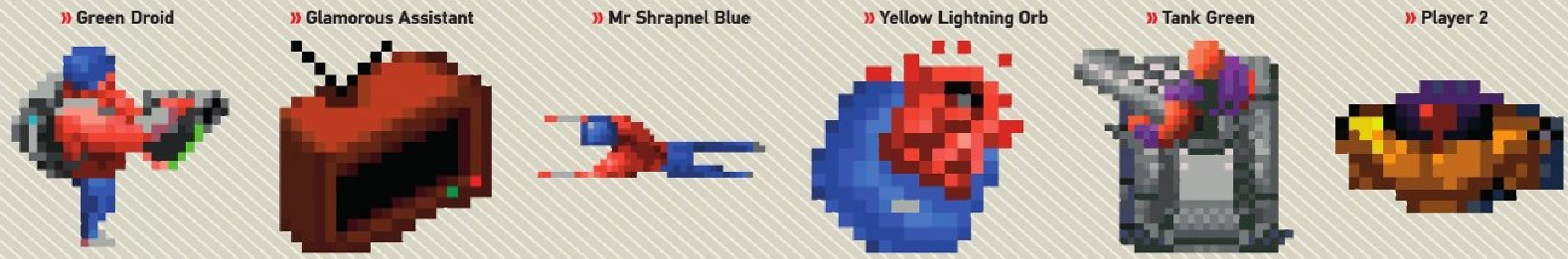
» Grey Droid » Rocket Launcher » Upgraded Caterpillar » Blue Cobra » Evil MC » Pink Grunt



» Buffalo Bot » Cameraman » High Powered Grenade » Super VCR » Grey Snake Man » Green Caterpillar



» Green Droid » Glamorous Assistant » Mr Shrapnel Blue » Yellow Lightning Orb » Tank Green » Player 2



» Grenade Launcher » 2600-Inch TV » Dead » Disembodied Head » Tank » Yellow Droid



» Blue Caterpillar » Toaster » Vacation » Spinning Blade » Mutoid Man » Spread Gun

Critical Reception

What the gaming press thought...



"Smash T.V. is without a doubt the purest, most brain-off, reflexes-on blastathon I've ever played - if you're a shoot-'em-up addict, this is the best fix you could ever get."

- MEAN MACHINES, ISSUE 20

Twin Galaxies High Scores

ARCADE (SINGLE-PLAYER ONLY)
- **NAME:** MARTIN BEDARD
- **POINTS:** 19,777,280

ARCADE (TWO-PLAYER TEAM)
- **NAME:** MARTIN BEDARD & ROBERT MRUCZEK
- **POINTS:** 13,576,030

the times; a story caked in satire, which drew unsubtle inspiration from Eighties popular culture, most prominently the sci-fi blockbusters – *Terminator*, *RoboCop*, and, of course, the 1987 action movie *The Running Man*, which essentially helped form 99.99 per cent of the game's plot.

Set in the then-future year of 1999, *Smash T.V.*'s story saw two players participating in a dangerous game show. Hosted by a sinister host, the fictional show was split into three stages, with each taking the appearance of a high-security facility made up of multiple arenas. The gameplay saw you working your way through each facility one arena at a time, repeatedly locked in ferocious battles for survival as bat-wielding thugs, deadly droids and mutant freaks gradually poured into the room.

To survive, players had to use whatever weapons they could lay their hands on and combat wave after wave of enemies until the exits to each arena finally opened. With one arena clear you exited into the next, where the chaos repeated until the arena housing the level guardian was reached. Always a ridiculously tough challenge designed to test the skills of even the most seasoned gamers, *Smash T.V.* kicked its boss fights off with its most iconic, Mutoid Man: a giant, bullet-spewing man-tank, who Eugene has colourfully described as "like the tanks from *Robotron*, *Terminator*, and some twisted Tim Burton nightmare."



» [Arcade] *Smash T.V.* was an impossible slog in single-player, but came alive when two contestants could work together.

Another aspect that undoubtedly helped to raise *Smash T.V.*'s profile in arcades was its visual design. Very few games were more dazzling or colourful (or anywhere near as gory), but it was the impressive level of detail and presentation that really set it apart. From the way that the contestants in the game would get blown to bits in gloriously gory fashion – firing body parts high into the sky – to how moving from one arena to the next gave you a brief peek behind the curtain to show you the busy broadcast team filming your every action, *Smash T.V.* was as exhausting to look at as it was to play.



Understandably, the game found enormous success, and received a number of home ports. It also featured on the retro compilations *Arcade Party Pack* for the PlayStation and *Midway Arcade Treasures* for PS2, GameCube, PC and Xbox, and for a time was made available on XBLA.

Like *Robotron*, *Smash T.V.* also received its own spiritual sequel in the form of the 1991 arcade game *Total Carnage*, which moved away from the killing gameshow premise and arena-based gameplay, dropping gamers into a traditional vertical shooter about two mercenaries trying to topple an evil general and an army of mutants.

Power-ups

You won't get far in this game without them... what are they? Power-ups and weapons of course. Here's a rundown of them all.



»Prizes

These gift boxes litter the playing field and contain a number of prizes; cars, video recorders and even toasters.



»Cash

As well as presents, contestants can also collect bundles of cash, and silver and gold bars.



»Keys

Collecting keys was planned to grant access to Pleasure Domes, but the prize rooms never made it into the finished game.



»Sneaker

Gives the player a temporary speed boost; very handy in evading the huge number of enemies the game throws at you.



»Force Field

This creates a circular shield on the floor that gives you temporary invulnerability and a brief respite from the chaos.



»Shield

Creates a cluster of spinning blades that circle the player and will kill any of the weaker enemies they connect with.



»Smart Bomb

As you might expect, collecting this useful pick-up insta-vanquishes any enemy on the screen.



»Rocket

Pick up this power-up and your standard gun is upgraded to a rocket launcher.



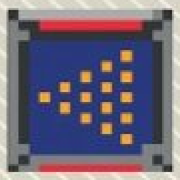
»Grenade Launcher

The grenade launcher spits out powerful grenades at a silly rate. Its only real drawback is its short range.



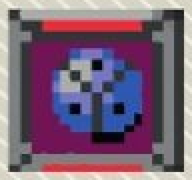
»High-Powered Grenade Launcher

An effective weapon against bosses, it fires high-powered grenades into the air. Inaccurate but powerful.



»Spread Gun

The *Contra* favourite appears and proves just as effective at taking out swarms of enemies.



»Drone

This handy drone circles the player firing the same weapon, at the same time and in the same direction he's aiming.

The Conversions

We give you our honest impressions on the various home ports of Smash T.V.

Amiga

It looks the part but play reveals a number of differences over the coin-op: a smaller playing field, slightly wonky enemy patterns and some iffy collision detection. This version does allow you to play the game using two joysticks to faithfully replicate the 'feel' of the coin-op.





Spectrum

This port is a slick but very different to the arcade game. It lacks multiplayer, the level placement of enemies and attack patterns are all jumbled, and the bosses are pushovers compared to their arcade counterparts. Still a good blast though.



Commodore 64

The C64 port is an impressive effort. While it doesn't have the same level of presentation of the Speccy port, visually and design-wise it is impressively faithful to the coin-op, and the best version of the 8-bits.



CPC

A facsimile of the Spectrum version with the exception that it has more colours, though we still think the CPC version is the slightly weaker of the two ports. It doesn't have the same level of presentation, you can't define your controls, and the scrolling isn't as fast.



NES

This NES conversion plays well, if a little slow, supports two-player co-op, and comes pretty close to the coin-op. It even offers a bizarre control option that enables two players to use two controllers each using a multitap.



Super Smash T.V. Mega Drive

Certainly one of the best conversions of *Smash T.V.* you can find. It looks, sounds and plays the part and, like the NES port, enables you to play the game using two Mega Drive pads.



Super Smash T.V. Super Nintendo

Looking indistinguishable from the arcade game, this is a pretty flawless update. The controls really seal it – the controller's four face buttons are used for aiming and firing you gun.

Super Smash T.V. SMS & Game Gear

The graphics might look good in screenshots, but don't be fooled; the ropey animation and hit detection and the unresponsive controls let things down. The enemy-to-arena ratio also feels out of synch.





Atari ST

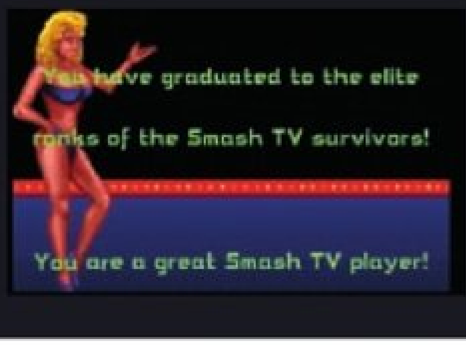
As we expected, there little separating this port from the Amiga conversion; this one just looks slightly less colourful and the sound isn't quite as crisp. As a bonus, this port even supports dual-joystick controls.

Smash T.V.'s ending is best described as brilliantly silly, with the show's sinister Evil M.C acting as the final boss. A re-skinned Mutoid Man, the Host has no shortage of firepower at his disposal… or eyeballs, for that matter, which he fires instead of lasers









Boss Rush

Everybody knows that the real stars of *Smash T.V.* are the game's bosses. They might be few in number but they certainly make up for it in power and character. Whereas early arcade game bosses could take thousands of bullets without receiving so much as a graze, the bosses in *Smash T.V.* really changed videogame boss conventions by introducing context-sensitive weak spots and showing sprites physically degrade as you shot them; to defeat them, players would have to turn their gunfire on individual targets of their body, which gradually and realistically became bloody messes. Being that they formed such iconic parts of the game, we asked Eugene to tell us a little about their creation.

EUGENE ON: MUTOID MAN

"MUTOID MAN WAS the first boss out of the gate, and it seems like it took forever to get him going. But what a piece of work! All the art and animations were crafted one pixel at a time, frame by frame by Tobias. This was before Maya and Photoshop. It's still some of the coolest isometric 2D-3D art out there. Multiple attacks with laser eyes for a surprise killer rounded out Mutoid Man's arsenal. Like a Russian nesting doll, new incarnations of Mutoid Man were continually revealed after the player seemingly killed him The awesome smoke effects, explosions, and decapitation 'Blood Boil' effect at Mutoid's demise were unlike anything seen before in a videogame. I think we spent several days running that effect over and over. After spending three-quarters of the project on the first boss we had to figure out how to make three more bosses in a third of the time without shorting the action and coolness!"

Difficulty Rating:



EUGENE ON: THE TWIN COBRAS

"THE TWIN COBRAS were inspired by the *Indiana Jones* movies, and we wanted to have realistic snake motion without having the artists work six months on snake animations. So we came up with a cool algorithmic snake motion using a sine wave-type function and basic vertebrae for artwork, having the program do the rest. Originally we wanted to have wounded vertebrae art, but this got canned in the panic to ship the product. The venom weapon, snake vertebrae motion and illumination effects provide some great action and eye candy."

Difficulty Rating:



EUGENE ON: THE EVIL M.C

"AT THIS POINT we were really running out of time, so Turmell and Tobias took Mutoid Man and morphed him into the final boss, the Evil M.C. He's definitely deadly – and disgusting in his polka dot underwear!"

Difficulty Rating: 3/5

EUGENE ON: SCARFACE

"SCARFACE WAS ESSENTIALLY a Sinistar head amped up on crack. Tobias gave him an angry animated scowl, a defensive shield, and face with multiple wound levels. As programmer, I created some agitated and menacing movements to try to crush the player, and avoid the player's heavy grenades. Scarface fights back with a variety of particle weapons, climaxing with the skull's evil eyes. Our goal was to make him as mean as possible, while still beatable, after separating the player from his coin stash."

Difficulty Rating: 5/5



MEET YOUR MAKERS

We give some useful advice on how to take Smash T.V.'s bosses off the air

MUTOID MAN

To defeat this monstrous intimidating half-man-half-tank, use the grenade launcher and rockets to first pick off the two gunners stationed on either side of his tracks, then focus all your fire on his arms until they're destroyed, avoiding or killing the Mr. Shrapnels that occasionally appear in the arena. With this done, move fire to his body using High-Powered Grenades. With Mutoid's body destroyed, only his head and tank tracks remain. In this form he's more skittish but relatively easy to finish off.

SCARFACE

Scarface attacks by erratically moving around the arena trying to crush our heroes, while also firing bullets and the occasional spinning blade too. What makes this boss so punishing is the heavy duty steel shield protecting his head. Annoyingly, each of the many sections of shield must be destroyed, requiring you to keep circling the boss and getting in close with your shots. With the shield destroyed, Scarface starts to take on damage far more rapidly. Even when you think you've killed him, though, the battle isn't quite over, as his skull continues the fight. At this stage of his destruction, he's faster and attacks by firing bolts of electricity from its eyes. Just keep pummelling his skull with grenades until he finally bites the dust. It'll happen eventually; trust us.

THE TWIN COBRAS

The final stage in *Smash T.V.* is a strange Aztec-style set, and waiting for you in its final arena are two giant snakes. Cutely coined The Twin Cobras, they only have a small number of attacks, basically shooting fireballs from their mouths and firing off annoying spinning blades, but their erratic movements make their attacks difficult to read . It also doesn't help that you have to ensure you hit their heads to inflict any damage. As the game treats them as a single boss, a good tactic is to hold a position at the bottom of the screen, concentrate your fire on one of the snake heads and diligently watch for when one of them swings their head back to strike.

THE EVIL M.C

With the final stage clear, you are left with a few more arenas to fight through before you face off against *Smash T.V.*'s final boss, the smarmy Host. Acknowledging his cheesy one-liners and glittery red suit won't get him very far against the might of our two heroes, during the commercial break he's paid a quick visit to Mutoid Man's plastic surgeon to get some mechanical augmentations and a hefty does of growth steroids. The good news is that the Host attacks in the exact same manner as Mutoid, and so is pretty easy to defeat. As before, simply target his tracks, work your way around to his arms and then body until it goes bang, and then pummel him in the head with everything you've got.

» YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO FORGOTTEN GAME SYSTEMS

OBSCURA MACHINA

#7 Panasonic M2



JUST THE FACTS

A controller similar to the N64's, including an analogue stick, was developed. Evidence for it exists in the form of photos from media events and the options screen in some beta games

The M2 hardware was reworked into extremely expensive multimedia and kiosk systems. These had games released for them, but most were casual games for the elderly

In Japan, 3D house presentation tools such as vizHouse, plus disaster prevention software, ran on the multimedia systems

Car presentation software for Pontiac, Chevrolet and Chrysler was powered by the M2

Certain Russian automated teller machines utilise M2 technology

Some Japanese vending machines for drinks also have M2 hardware at their heart

Five M2-powered arcade games are known to have been released by Konami: *Polystars*, *Total Vice*, *Battle Tryst*, *Evil Night* and *Heat Of Eleven '98*

Fully functional prototype games, such as *IMSA World Championship Racing*, have been freely released into the community. It almost wasn't, though, since the beta was given to a collector with instructions to distribute it, but he hoarded it

Around the 1993 launch of the 3DO, the system's original designers RJ Mical and Dave Needle began developing its successor – codenamed Bulldog. In July 1994 the first details were uncovered by magazines, and then officially confirmed by Trip Hawkins in September that year, who coined the name 'Mark 2 Accelerator'. In addition to licensing it to various hardware manufacturers, The 3DO Company also intended to pursue an "arcade business model" by offering the technology to arcade developers. In early 1995 Matsushita Electric Industrial came aboard as the first official hardware licensee, with Konami and Capcom rumoured to be interested for their arcade divisions. One month prior to that year's E3, plans for M2 global domination were revealed, and so began the hyped press coverage. Soon after, in July, development kits were shipped to prospective developers. Everything seemed rosy, but things would change before the year's end.

A fascinating revelation comes from Trip Hawkins, Electronic Arts and 3DO Company founder, when asked how much the original 3DO cost. "The hardware business used $100 million in capital, but it is worth noting that I got that back by selling the licence for our next-generation M2 technology to Matsushita in [December] 1995."

Under this agreement, Matsushita would be in charge of development and launch of the hardware, with 3DO focusing on software. Unfortunately this transition signalled the M2's slow demise. 3DO was required to provide technical support for third-party developers until 31 March 1997, after which sole responsibility went to Matsushita. Since Matsushita had less experience with the technology, many developers were concerned. Rob Povey, technical director for US developer Boss Game Studios at the time, claimed that after the sale his hardware boards were updated but Matsushita never made contact regarding continued development. Many companies, despite having dev kits, were reluctant to risk investing further when Matsushita was fumbling.

This souring was unfortunate, since by all accounts the system had the potential to initiate the next generation, even if its capabilities were slightly exaggerated. Hiroyuki Sakai of Matsushita infamously claimed M2's main competitor would be Sega's Model 3 arcade board. Kenji Eno of WARP instead likened it to being between the N64 and Dreamcast, which, considering the N64 was only released in 1996, would have still been impressive. "I feel like the M2 was an enhanced N64," Eno explained. "Saturn and PlayStation displayed about 3,000 polygons per frame. Dreamcast was about ten times this figure, while compared to M2 the DC was about three to four times more powerful. Having said that, I looked at some old screenshots of *D2* on M2 and thought it was pretty good for such old hardware. When the M2 project was cancelled, we thought





We've already covered a lot of unusual machines, but you can't get more obscure than one that technically doesn't exist. John Szczepaniak examines the (mostly) unreleased M2

PERFECT THREE

TOBE! POLYSTARS

■ Blending Konami's *Parodius* and *TwinBee* in polygons, with a dash of *RayStorm* for good measure, *Polystars* is an obscure arcade exclusive best enjoyed by two players. Simple, but a lot of silly fun.



D2

■ Entirely different to *D2* on the Dreamcast. You control the unborn child of Laura from the original *D*, who is stolen from her womb, warped back in time to a medieval castle and turned into an adult by Satan.



POWER CRYSTAL

■ Developed in the UK by Perceptions, this hugely ambitious 3D adventure resembled an early *Elder Scrolls* game, planning to feature many of the character-development mechanics promised by *Fable*.







» Thomas Riemer's white development kit, alongside a small portion of the accompanying documentation. This type of unit is now a collector's item.





» As seen at trade shows, in the options for *IMSA Racing* and the playback menu in retail systems, some controllers used a design similar to the N64.

about releasing *D2* on the N64, but its position wasn't good in Japan. Honestly, I liked the M2 a lot."

Eno also made cryptic statements about the M2 being able to punch above its weight. "Though M2 was 64-bit, it was really a 128-bit class machine, though I can't actually explain how it works here. Since the M2 had 8MB of RAM, it was easier to use its true power. As a developer of PlayStation and Saturn software, it was really hard to deliver because they didn't have enough RAM. It also came with an analogue pad, so I think [at the time] the M2 had the highest specs ever. Plus it could render an amazing amount of polygons on the fly and they wouldn't be distorted at all. With the M2's advanced light-sourcing, you could also have multiple coloured lights per environment, even on the same screen. It was amazing!"

The biggest revelation from Eno was the number of games that were in development. Magazines at the time mooted 15 titles, but Eno said there were more. "As far as I know, 20 to 30 titles were in development in Japan. There were no arcade translations or sequels. In Japan, sequels and arcade translations sell more, and since all the games were original, I thought it would be more popular in foreign countries. I saw other M2 titles and they were amazing, so you guys could have expected a lot from the system."

In July 1997, Matsushita president Yoichi Morishita announced the M2's cancellation. The reasons given were Sony's dominance of the market with its PlayStation brand, already well entrenched, and hardware specifications that were growing increasingly outdated. Although slightly ahead of the N64, the M2 would have had no chance against the more powerful Dreamcast, which itself failed against Sony's subsequent PS2.

Technically, the M2 was reworked into expensive multimedia and kiosk systems, intended for business use. Some edutainment software was released, and the technology also trickled into all manner of other obscure formats. The only games of note to be completed and reach the public were five of Konami's arcade titles. Some M2 beta games were leaked, but require the hardware to play. Dev kits prove popular on the underground collector's market, with more information in the ASSEMbler community. Videos of tech demos can be found on Youtube by searching for '3DO M2'.

Thanks to Thomas Riemer, Bitrate, Malc, Yakumo of Segagagadomain.com, Stephen Flynn and the ASSEMbler community for information and images.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Treasure

Radiant Silvergun, Sin And Punishment, Ikaruga, Bangai-O… For the past two decades, a handful of talented coders, designers and artists has been quietly creating some of the most precious gems in gaming history…

If you love games then you should love Treasure. If you love unbridled creativity and joyful freedom of expression; if you love unhinged strangeness and superhard difficulty levels; if you love the games that other people don't get; if you love little pixel people and robots running around screens that are brimming with chaos, you should love Treasure. If you love those things and you hate publishers that put financials before fun and sales targets before silliness; if you hate creative compromises imposed by the latest big brand tie-in; if you hate middle managers who know nothing about games but everything about spreadsheets, you should love Treasure.

It might seem like a strange thing to say about a company whose first steps included an alliance with the living embodiment of big business – one of the very first games the company worked on was *McDonald's Treasure Land Adventure*. But in the nearly 20 years since then, since a handful of talented programmers and artists left Konami to follow their own creative urges, Treasure has been at the very cutting edge of artistic freedom, forging its own very particular path and creating a softography guided by nothing other than the whims of the creators.

The results are sometimes strange, often perplexing, nearly always bewildering, and occasionally just plain bad, but more often than not they distil more genius in their tiny pixels than many other developers have managed in their entire histories. There is, quite simply, no other company quite like Treasure. There are, quite simply, no games like the games Treasure makes. Games like *Alien Soldier, Guardian Heroes, Radiant Silvergun, Sin And Punishment, Ikaruga, Bangai-O*…

☐ INSTANT EXPERT

Treasure is a record breaker. According to the *Guinness World Records Gamer's Edition 2011*, the rarest 2D shooter is the Dreamcast *Bangai-O Prize Edition*, which sells for about £250.

In Treasure's Mega Drive RPG, *Light Crusader*, you can find the best armour in the game right near the start. The Gold Armour is dropped by respawning enemies that are found in the game's first dungeon.

Treasure was developing an action racing game called *GunBeat* for Sega's NAOMI arcade board, but it was eventually cancelled before release.

Treasure created a DVD to accompany the Japanese release of *Ikaruga*, featuring the country's top players playing the game to perfection.

Treasure often outsources work to other developers, such as ex-Taito microstudio G.rev, which helped out on *Ikaruga* and *Gradius V*.

The *Sega Ages* re-release of *Alien Soldier* allows players to pick higher-quality game sprites than were featured in the original Mega Drive version of the game.

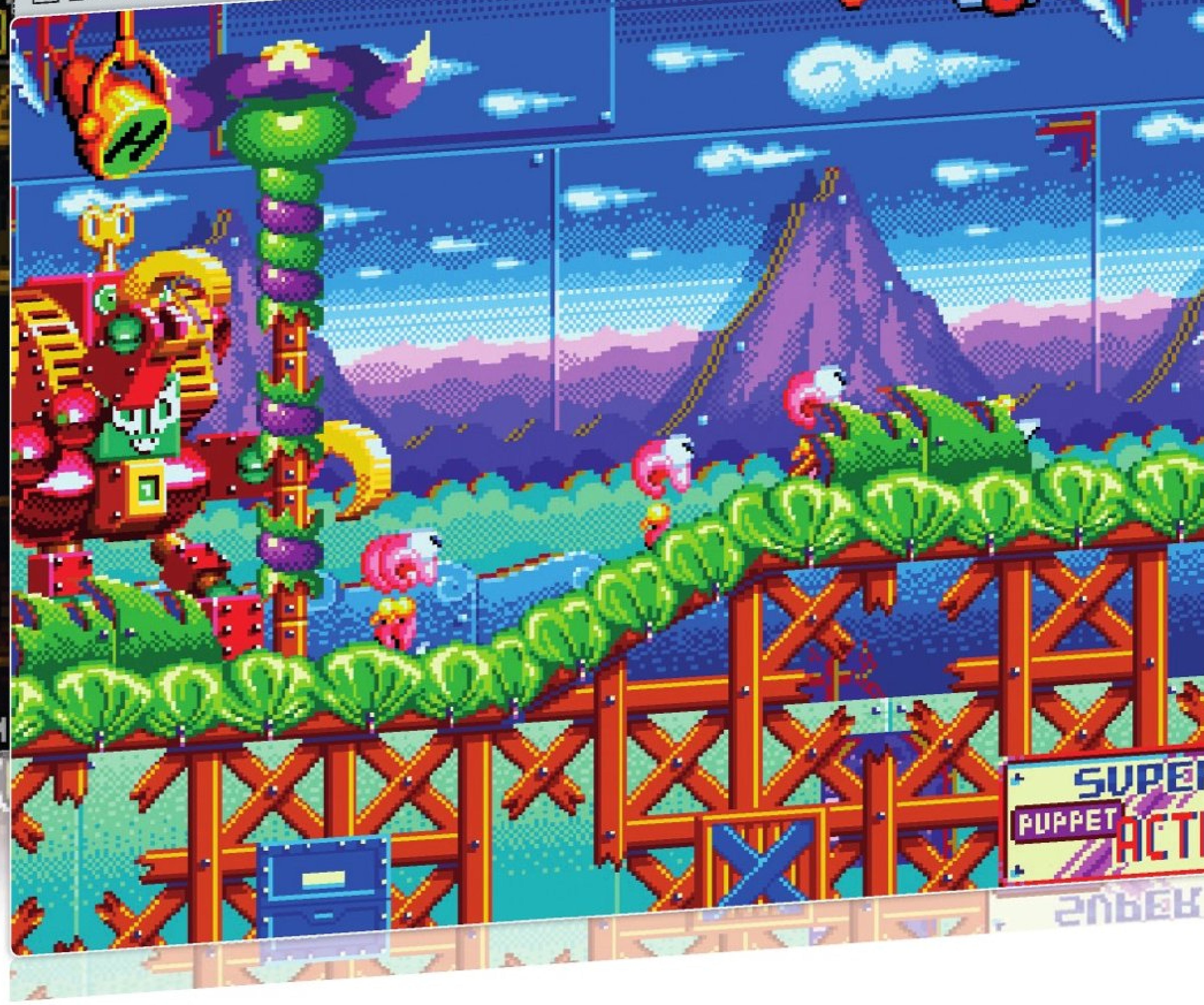
In the beginning

The game that started it all, however, was *Gunstar Heroes*, and in many ways it laid the foundations for what was to follow. Released in September 1993 for the Sega Mega Drive, this seemingly simple run-and-gun game took the genre and turned it on its head. Following all of the rules demanded by the genre, it then broke them to create a riotous, gleeful, colourful, cutting-edge slice of brilliance. With its swarms of enemies and elaborate bosses, it pushed the Mega Drive to the limits of its technical capacity, and its mop-topped main men, Gunstars Red and Blue, looked brilliant as they blasted their way through brightly coloured levels. Along with weapons that you could mix and match to derive your own tools of destruction with which to take on board game bosses and transforming robots, it was also genuinely amusing thanks to enemy soldiers that occasionally did a little dance and the brief appearance of the odd farm animal here and there.

After it was released to a pretty positive reception, typified by winning the Best Action Game award in US games mag *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, it was followed by one or two less than stellar titles, as



DYNAMITE HEADDY



“Our philosophy is, simply, to create the games we want to make” TREASURE CEO MASATO MAEGAWA



well as a couple of licence jobs, such as the aforementioned McDonald's game and a fighting tie-in with the *Yu Yu Hakusho* manga series, which proved to be surprisingly good. Based on an award-winning comic about a car crash victim revived by the gods of the underworld so he could become a paranormal detective, the game was never released in the West, but it took the comic's martial arts and built a technically accomplished four-player brawler around them and provided the inspiration for the company's later, even more multiplayer, even more mayhem-filled scrolling brawler, *Guardian Heroes*.

To return, though, to *Gunstar Heroes*, Treasure's founder, Masato Maegawa, had originally pitched the game to his superiors at Konami, only to see it rejected. This was the catalyst that hastened the birth of the company. It paved the way for Maegawa and his fellow band of pioneers to strike out on their own – a group of programmers, artists and designers who had previously worked on titles like *Super Castlevania IV* (SNES) and *Contra III: The Alien Wars* (SNES, better known as *Super Probotector: Alien Rebels* in the UK).

And when Treasure created its first game, *Gunstar Heroes*, it really did start as it meant to go on. The game encapsulates Treasure's entire oeuvre in microcosm: it was technically cutting-edge, creatively innovative, visually stunning, genuinely funny and followed up – and perhaps made possible – by licensed products and other games that ranged widely in terms of their quality, but that always burned brightly in terms of innovation and ingenuity.

Since those heady early days, the industry has, of course, moved on. Successive hardware iterations have come and gone in the inexorable march from pixel to polygon, two of the world's largest multinationals have entered the videogame hardware market, and Japan has, in many ways, been eclipsed by the West. Cloud computing, micropayments, online persistent worlds… The videogame universe has changed beyond all recognition. And yet, from Treasure's perspective, not a lot has changed at all. Then, as now, the game is the thing.

Hidden Treasure

There is little sense of Treasure's illustrious history when you venture to the company headquarters; little sign that here is one of the most inspiring hotbeds of creativity in the modern world. From the outside, it looks like any other nondescript office building in Japan. Stepping out of the elevator into the entrance lobby, it looks like a slightly untidy accountant's office. Yet these humble rooms really do contain one of the powerhouses of arthouse videogames – even if the mad maestro in charge resembles nothing more than a typical Japanese salaryman,

BY THE NUMBERS

16: The number of full-time employees who currently work at Treasure.

10,000: The number of copies released in Japan of the original N64 version of *Bakuretsu Muteki Bangaioh*, hence its rarity today.

£150: The approximate amount an original Saturn copy of *Radiant Silvergun* will set you back if you buy it from an auction site.

1,000: The number of bullets you can fire off at one time in bullet hell puzzler *Bangai-O*.

32: The number of published games developed by Treasure, not counting re-releases.

50,000: The number of copies of *Ikaruga* released for the Dreamcast.

22: The number of tracks on the *Gradius V Soundtracks* album, released by Konami Media Entertainment.

68000: The Motorola 68000 was the CPU at the heart of the Mega Drive, as referenced in the opening text of *Alien Soldier*: "NOW IS TIME TO THE 68000 HEART ON FIRE!"



» [PlayStation 2] *Gradius V* marked a return to old haunting grounds for Treasure's ex-Konami coders.



PREFERRED PARTNERS

One of the reasons that Treasure has been able to punch above its weight is that over the course of its history it has collaborated with and outsourced work to various other companies. On *Ikaruga* the development team received help from G.rev, and on *Sin And Punishment* from one of Nintendo's internal development teams. The opening movies for both *Radiant Silvergun* and *Guardian Heroes* were created by external animation houses. So even though there are still only 16 full-time employees at the company, the number of people who worked on, for example, the original *Guardian Heroes* was something like 70 people after freelancers and contractors are factored in.



complete with sensible haircut and standard-issue spectacles. But Masato Maegawa truly is responsible for some of the strangest, silliest, most excellent, most amazing games in the world. So how does he do it?

"Our philosophy is, simply, to create the games we want to make," he says, sitting in the company's boardroom, a barren bit of office space distinguished only by a row of videogame posters and a couple of arcade cabinets in the corner. "And that philosophy hasn't changed a bit, so actually there haven't been too many changes since we founded the company."

Indeed, in the years since *Gunstar Heroes* blazed onto the scene, Treasure has maintained all the hallmarks of its original success. The company has constantly reinvented the rules of gaming, continually pushed the technological capabilities of the hardware, and refused to let the march of progress dim the light of traditional 2D genres. Games like *Radiant Silvergun* on the Saturn and *Sin And Punishment* on both the N64 and Wii have pushed successive generations of hardware, preserving old-school game designs in modern-day amber.

And yet as development budgets grow ever more expensive and development teams swell in size, Treasure remains just a handful of individuals. "Our original office was in Ueno and there were about ten of us at that time," continues Maegawa. "But as I mentioned earlier, our philosophy hasn't changed at all, and there are still only 16 full-time employees now, plus some contractors, so really there hasn't been much change."

One thing that has changed, though, is that the company no longer uses freeware development tools to put together its games. In the days when the Sega Saturn could only muster a meagre 200,000 polygons per second – compared to the 500 million pumped out by modern consoles – Treasure could happily rely on the odd bit of software it found on the internet, combined with the company's own programming ingenuity, to get the most out of each game's host hardware. Nowadays, the production staff tend to take a more precise approach. "In the old days, in the time of *Radiant Silvergun*, all of the programmers and designers were trying to suck every single drop out of the hardware to reach the maximum level," says Maegawa. "Now it's not like that; we have good middleware, so instead of spending our energy to persuade the hardware, we're using middleware to make the process much more efficient."

Pursuit of excellence

But that single-minded doggedness that used to be required to get the best out of the hardware hasn't gone away. Maegawa is almost monk-like in his pursuit of videogame excellence. "I don't read comics, I don't watch anime, I don't watch movies or TV, and actually my colleagues are often telling me off for not being up to date," he says. This donnish air of absent-mindedness really does seem to extend to practical matters, too. At the time of writing, *Radiant Silvergun* director Hiroshi Iuchi's latest blog entry recounts how he has recently been working so hard that he forgot it was his wife's birthday.

A slightly happier example, though, was demonstrated a few years ago when the company moved home. "When we moved from our original offices in Ueno we wanted

"I don't read comics, I don't watch anime, I don't watch movies or TV"

MASATO MAEGAWA JUST MAKES GAMES

TIMELINE

1992 TREASURE IS FORMED BY MASATO MAEGAWA AND A HANDFUL OF EX-KONAMI CODERS, DESIGNERS AND ARTISTS

1993 TREASURE RELEASES ITS FIRST GAME, *GUNSTAR HEROES*, LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR THE NEXT 20 YEARS. IT ALSO HERALDED THE START OF A PARTICULARLY FRUITFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH PUBLISHER SEGA

1996 THE COMPANY DEVELOPS *GUARDIAN HEROES*, ITS FIRST GAME FOR THE SEGA SATURN

1997 *YUKE YUKE!! TROUBLE MAKERS* BECOMES TREASURE'S FIRST TITLE MADE AVAILABLE THROUGH A PUBLISHER OTHER THAN SEGA WHEN ENIX RELEASES IT FOR THE NINTENDO 64

1998 TREASURE CEMENTS ITS REPUTATION FOR THE REST OF TIME BY RELEASING *RADIANT SILVERGUN*, A GAME THAT IS STILL CONSIDERED A TIMELESS CLASSIC

1999 *GUNBEAT*, A GAME BEING DEVELOPED BY TREASURE FOR THE SEGA NAOMI ARCADE BOARD, IS CANCELLED

2004 RETURNING TO ITS ROOTS, TREASURE HELPS OUT ORIGINAL EMPLOYER KONAMI BY DEVELOPING ONE OF THE GREATEST GAMES IN THE *GRADIUS* SERIES, *GRADIUS V*

2006 *BANGAI-O* IS SELECTED AS ONE OF THE GREATEST 50 GAMES OF ALL TIME BY THE AUTHORS OF *GAME ON!: FROM PONG TO OBLIVION – THE GREATEST VIDEO GAMES OF ALL TIME*

2011 PROVING THAT 2D GAMING IS STILL RELEVANT, TREASURE BLITZES XBOX LIVE WITH ITS BACK CATALOGUE, BRINGING *BANGAI-O*, *GUARDIAN HEROES* AND *RADIANT SILVERGUN* TO NEW AUDIENCES



to move to Shinjuku," says Maegawa. "But actually these offices, where we ended up, are not officially in Shinjuku ward." Nevertheless, the address – Nakano Chuo 1-1-1 – is still pretty cool. "'Chuo' means 'centre', so it sounds like a really important place!" explains Maegawa, outlining a happy accident that, in many ways, is typical of the company's make-it-up-as-you-go-along design philosophy.

Design documents for Treasure games are typically no more than one or two pages in length, containing only the broadest outline of the finished game, with the details and the fine-tuning taking place during the development process itself. Describing the development of *Guardian Heroes*, for example, Maegawa explains: "We didn't use any special tools to make the game. The game design document was just a three-page outline. We just sort of created the game using trial and error."

While that might sound a little haphazard by today's standards of agile software development and massively micromanaged development teams, Treasure's close-knit size and the dedication of its team members to hardcore gaming make the process work. "It's not like we have a strict company hierarchy, with myself at the top," explains Maegawa. "Everyone here is on the same plane. Our company policy is basically freedom. So it's not like a traditional salaryman-style company at all."

Indeed it seems that everybody at Treasure has a hand in everything it makes, in one way or another. Hardcore Treasure-heads like to identify the key teams behind the different games, even combing through the credits of much older games in a bid to trace Treasure's development teams back to their days working for Konami, but the truth is that while there are some teams that have worked on more than one title together, the handful of permanent members and part-time contractors that make up the company drift in and out of development projects as required. Thus, *Radiant Silvergun* director Hiroshi Iuchi picked artist Tetsuhiko Kikuchi as the main man for that game but turned to Yasushi Suzuki for its spiritual sequel, *Ikaruga*.

The one thing that unites this loosely shifting and coalescing collective, apart from their pure unadulterated talent, is, of course, their love for games – apparent in everything they do, whether it's a character in *Bangai-O* making badly translated jokes about the joy of 2D gaming, or the high-twitch onslaught that *Ikaruga* unleashes with a cascading beauty.

"The people who work here are pure game lovers," confirms Maegawa. "Most of the games that we create are like shooters or action games, so most of our employees love those games. Some don't even dare to play other genres, like RPGs."

Stretching the boundaries

Nevertheless, that hasn't stopped Treasure from trying its hand at producing games in those "other genres" – or even trying to create a few genres of its own. Only a few ▶



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Masato Maegawa
Treasure's founder and CEO, Masato Maegawa, is still at the company. Having previously worked as a programmer at Konami on games like *Castlevania* and *Bucky O'Hare*, he also programmed many of Treasure's early games, such as *Alien Soldier*, *Light Crusader* and *Dynamite Headdy*, and supervised the creation of *Gunstar Heroes* and *Yu Yu Hakusho*. In recent years, however, he has been listed mostly as the producer of the latest titles, like *Sin And Punishment 2*.


» Masato Maegawa

Hideyuki Suganami
Another founding member of Treasure and a programmer. He worked on *Gunstar Heroes*, *Alien Soldier*, *Mischief Makers* and *Sin And Punishment* before leaving the company, but has continued to work for it on a freelance basis, on both *Gunstar Super Heroes* and *Sin And Punishment 2*.

Hiroshi Iuchi
Actually left Treasure before returning to work as the director of *Radiant Silvergun*, *Ikaruga* and *Gradius V*. Since then he has again left the company, though he also continues to do work for it on a freelance basis.

Mitsuru Yaida
Also known as Yaiman, Yaida was the programmer behind the *Bangai-O* series, and has worked for Treasure since the company was founded. Having had a hand in many of the company's early titles, more recently he has worked most prominently on its handheld titles.

Tetsuhiko Kikuchi
Another founding member of Treasure, Tetsuhiko Kikuchi worked on many of the company's early games, often credited as HAN. He left Treasure in 2007 and was most recently spotted in the credits of PSP title *Half-Minute Hero*, from Marvelous Entertainment, as an illustrator.

Norio Hanzawa
Also known as NON, Hanzawa was and continues to be responsible for the music in the majority of Treasure's games.

Yasushi Suzuki
An artist hired to work on enemy designs for *Radiant Silvergun*. He would go on to shape the visual style of *Sin And Punishment* and *Ikaruga* before leaving the company to pursue other interests, and has since published manga and art books.





» [N64] *Bangai-O* has appeared in various forms on the N64, Dreamcast, DS and Xbox 360.

“Xbox Live Arcade and the PlayStation Network look like very good platforms for our future”

NEXT-GEN CONSOLES: GIVING OLD GAMES A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

years after *Gunstar Heroes*, for example, the company created *Light Crusader*, an action-RPG for the Mega Drive. It featured all of the isometric graphics, armour-clad warriors and ale-filled taverns that you could rightfully expect from any self-respecting RPG, as well as a bit of characteristic Treasure oddity, exemplified by the decision to make one of the most powerful items in the game available right near the start of the game.

It wasn't quite as strange, however, as *Rakugaki Showtime*, on the PlayStation, which dressed up a frantic party-style battle game with a scrawled doodle visual style, or *Silhouette Mirage*, on the same platform, which gave action platforming a post-apocalyptic Biblical twist. *Freak Out* (*Stretch Panic* in the US) on the PlayStation 2 is probably the high watermark of Treasure weirdness, however, providing players with a whole stretchy, bendy game mechanic with which to tweak the boobs of enemies in a bid to overcome the game's 12 bosses. It didn't quite work, but as failures go it was a pretty glorious one.

In case it needs spelling out, these games provide ample proof that Treasure's release schedule is not guided by any sort of concessions to the whims of the market – or, it's tempting to think, concessions to any sort of logic at all. “As I mentioned earlier, our policy is to create the games that we want to create,” reiterates Maegawa. “Which does occasionally make things difficult financially. However, we've been in this industry for 18 years now so we've managed to overcome those struggles so far.”

One of the things that has helped the company do that is its willingness to undertake work on licensed games, with results that match the rest of its output: veering from occasional genius to sporadic misfire. It all started, of course, with that McDonald's game, a straightforward side-scrolling platform game featuring Ronald and chums, which was swiftly



» [Saturn] *Guardian Heroes* is set to be unleashed on a new generation when it's released on XBLA this year.



» [Saturn] *Guardian Heroes*' sprites wowed in 1996.

followed by *Yu Yu Hakusho*, that surprisingly effective Mega Drive fighting game that only received a release in Japan and, rather curiously, Brazil.

Licence to thrill

On the heels of those two, other licensed works included *Tiny Toon Adventures: Buster's Bad Dream*; *Hajime No Ippo*, a boxing game based on the Japanese comic of the same name and another high point for the company on the Game Boy Advance; the disappointing *Dragon Drive: D-Masters Shot* on the GameCube, tying in to the *Dragon Drive* manga; and a couple of fighting games for the Nintendo DS based on the *Bleach* universe: *Bleach: Dark Souls* and *Bleach: The Blade Of Fate*. By far the high point, though, of Treasure's work-for-hire was *Astro Boy: Omega Factor*. Based on Osamu Tezuka's manga and anime series, it transferred Treasure's side-scrolling expertise to the Game Boy Advance to create one of the finest games on the system – a brief but detailed hymn of praise for Tezuka's work.

Yet if Treasure's track record of selling out to The Man seems at odds with its self-professed policy of making whatever games take its fancy, it's a minor failing that's easy to forgive. After all, the likes of *Bleach* and *Astro Boy* clearly demonstrate that the company invested no less love or attention on these licensed titles – even if *McDonald's Treasure Land* doesn't. More importantly, these games provided the company with the financial lifeline it needs to pursue its dreams, as Maegawa points out: “If we can make some profit by working on safe projects and then use those profits to make the games that we want to make, that's great.”

It's in the games

And, for the most part, the games that Treasure wants to make are good, old-fashioned shoot-'em-ups. And they really are great. *Gunstar Heroes* was followed by *Alien Soldier* on the Mega Drive, a brutally

SIX OF THE BEST



Gunstar Heroes

Gunstar Heroes laid the foundation for Treasure's 20 years at the top. Bright, vibrantly coloured and full of typical Treasure craziness, it would go on to be ported to the Game Gear, Wii, PS2, PS3, Xbox 360 and even the iPhone.



Alien Soldier

Treasure managed to pack a lot into the follow-up to *Gunstar Heroes*. Starring the half-man, half-bird Epsilon-Eagle, the game features 31 bosses over 25 levels and was still brutally difficult, rewarding its devotees with a satisfying challenge.



Guardian Heroes

This took Treasure's brand of excess and applied it to the scrolling beat-'em-up. With as much carnage as any of the company's shooting games, it offered an alternative take on the genre to become one of the greatest games on the Saturn.



Radiant Silvergun

It's probably better known for those inflated eBay prices, but *Radiant Silvergun* remains one of the greatest shooters ever. Its forthcoming release on Xbox Live will finally allow a wider audience to appreciate its excellence for themselves.



Sin And Punishment

Co-developed with Nintendo, *Sin And Punishment* presented a glorious succession of set-pieces, in one of the pinnacles of the rail shooting genre. There simply isn't a single duff note over the entire course of the two games.



Bangai-O

How do we love *Bangai-O*? Let us count the ways. One moment it will fill the screen with bullet hell; the next it will present a geometric puzzle. One moment you'll be confronted with a boss; the next a pastiche of a popular game.



» [Saturn] Treasure's best known, least played and most expensive title: *Radiant Silvergun*.

» [Mega Drive] If we're going to be brazenly advertised at, we'd prefer it came from Treasure.

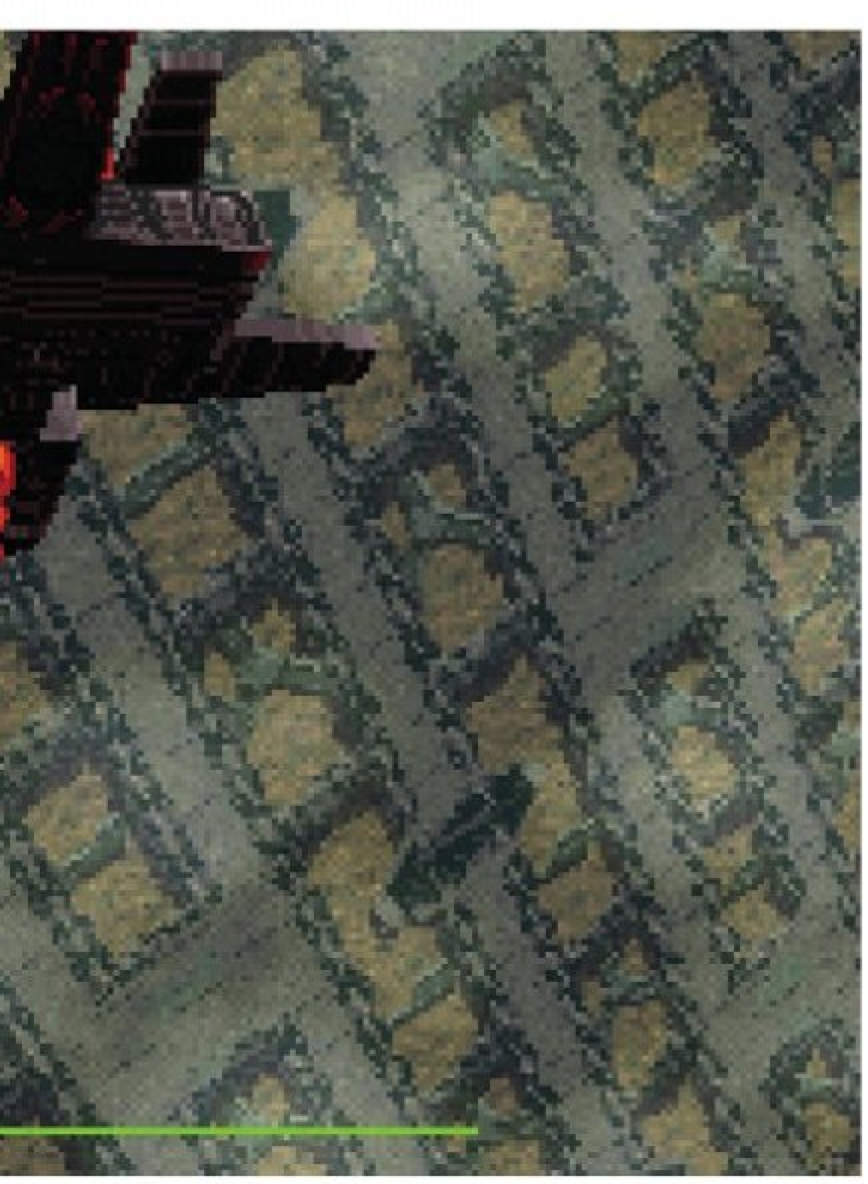


» [PS2] *Gradius V* is one of the highlights of the modern genre.



difficult boss rush from beginning to end, that required hours of practice and plenty of perseverance to play properly. It kept the pixel-perfect sprite work from *Gunstar Heroes*, but replaced the bright colours and breezy humour with a darker tone, a steeper difficulty curve, and an eagle-headed hero capable of teleporting across the screen and standing on the ceiling.

That vicious difficulty gave some hint of what was to come. The next high point of Treasure's shoot-'em-up output has since become a byword for exclusivity and excellence: *Radiant Silvergun* on the Saturn is simply one of the greatest shoot-'em-ups ever, as well as one of the most expensive to buy thanks to the limited number of units made available. Thanks to its intricate, non-linear plot and the joys of picking the right weapon and chaining attacks together – not to mention that limited run – it's now mostly famous for fetching astronomical prices on internet auction sites, but its running man boss predated *Rez* by years, and the sprite-based graphics that hovered over polygonal backgrounds retain their ability to take the breath away even now. It's astonishing to think that it was put together by a team of ten people, but the game's spiritual sequel, *Ikaruga*, which was released on the Dreamcast and later the GameCube, was apparently created by a team of just three.



Ikaruga would take *Radiant Silvergun*'s chain attacks to their logical conclusion and almost make a puzzle game of them. But before that, *Bangai-O*, released in Japan on the N64 and then worldwide on the Dreamcast, went the whole hog and effectively turned the bullet hell shoot-'em-up genre into a brainteaser. With bosses that didn't fight back and a choice of bouncing and homing bullets with which to solve each of its bamboozling levels, it is almost the perfect distillation of the Treasure philosophy, cramming near-impossible variety and a gloriously absurd sense of humour into its 44 levels.

It also contains one of the most compelling design features in the whole of gaming. The robots that starred in *Bangai-O* had a very special attack: the number of projectiles produced by this special attack increased in direct proportion to the magnitude of danger of the situation in which they were fired, and the attack recharged itself in proportion to the amount of damage it unleashed. It resulted in one of gaming's greatest pleasures: chaining together attacks by hurling your character into the most dangerous of situations, so you could watch the screen fill with gradually unfolding patterns of Mandelbrot-style complexity. Pure genius.



But of all of the company's shoot-'em-ups, perhaps the most technically accomplished is the *Sin And Punishment* series, which managed to eke every last drop of power out of first the N64 and then the Wii, making the old-fashioned 3D rail shooter feel new again. The first game filled the screen with explosions and enemies in a splendid succession of set-pieces; the second one, *Sin And Punishment: Successor Of The Skies*, brought bump mapping and specular highlights, and some of the best boss battles ever seen, to the Wii. Thanks to the Japan-only exclusivity of the first game in the series, the likes of *Rez* and *Panzer Dragoon* might be better known, but they pale in comparison to the non-stop intensity of *Sin And Punishment*.

Arthouse videogame developer

Across all of these games, one hallmark of Treasure titles is the consistently excellent art direction. Perhaps that's because many of the company's game designers also have a background in art: Hiroshi Iuchi, designer on *Radiant Silvergun*, came from a graphic design background, while Tetsuhiko Kikuchi (also known as HAN) was an artist and character designer before he led development on *Guardian Heroes*. Partly it's due to the extraordinary talent of the artist responsible for some of the visual excess in *Sin And Punishment*, Yasushi Suzuki, who also worked on *Radiant Silvergun* and *Ikaruga* before leaving the company to go freelance.

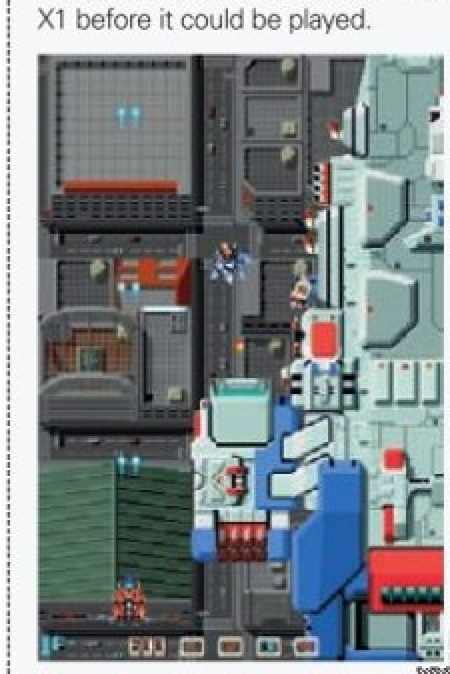
His work literally added another ▶

INSPIRED DEVELOPER

Though many of the company's games are now available on next-generation consoles, there's no doubting the retro appeal of Treasure's output. On-rail shooters, scrolling beat-'em-ups, run-and-guns… The likes of *Radiant Silvergun*, *Guardian Heroes*, *Bangai-O* and *Sin And Punishment* ostensibly conform to some of gaming's most traditional genres. But many of these games look even further into the past to take their inspiration.

Gunstar Heroes and *Alien Soldier* obviously owe much to the games developed by former employer Konami, such as the *Contra* series, while *Guardian Heroes* was developed out of the company's own efforts in making *Yu Yu Hakusho*.

Looking further afield, though, the action-RPG *Light Crusader* owes an obvious debt to Climax Entertainment's *Landstalker*, *Silpheed* was an enhanced remake of the original Mega-CD game, and *Radiant Silvergun*'s producer Hiroshi Iuchi has gone on the record as listing Irem's coin-op shooter *Image Fight* as his primary inspiration. Finally, *Bangai-O* was originally envisioned as a remake of *Hover Attack*, a title that had to be typed into the Z80-based Sharp X1 before it could be played.



THREE TO AVOID



Freak Out

There's no doubt that some of the criticism of *Freak Out* is unfair. The idea of using a scarf to manipulate the environment was interesting, and the visual style is fantastically odd. Unfortunately, the controls were difficult and the structure was unfairly punitive.



Silpheed: The Lost Planet

Treasure's first foray onto the PS2 was a remake of a Mega-CD title, and while it's not bad, compared to Treasure's other shooters it fell short. Even so, it still found time for innovation and experimentation, with a game design that rewarded players for taking unnecessary risks.



Advance Guardian Heroes

Again, by conventional standards, *Advance Guardian Heroes* is a decent game, but as a follow-up to one of the greatest beat-'em-ups of all time, it left a little to be desired. Dispensing with the setting of the original, as well as various innovations, it ended up as a button-basher.



» [Mega Drive] *Dynamite Headdy* stood out in an industry piled with action platformers.

"In the old days, the programmers were trying to suck every single drop out of the hardware to reach the maximum level"

MASATO MAEGAWA EXPLAINS HOW TREASURE ACCOMPLISHED SUCH WONDERS

dimension to the almost impossibly perfect pixel art that characterises the rest of the company's output. The sprites in games like *Guardian Heroes* and *Bangai-O* are breathtaking in their precision and simplicity, and Treasure's ability to produce clean, colourful lines proved especially well-suited to the bright-eyed innocence of the world of *Astro Boy*. But the gothic, moody style adopted for *Sin And Punishment* and *Ikaruga* allowed the company to veer off into entirely new aesthetic directions that are equally pleasing to the eye.

Aside from the fantastic art style, another characteristic common to many Treasure titles is technological innovation. *Sin And Punishment*'s graphics have already been mentioned, but the number of explosions that cascade across the screen in *Bangai-O* also pushed the N64 and Dreamcast to their respective limits. On the Mega Drive, both *Gunstar Heroes* and *Alien Soldier* were among the most technically accomplished titles on the system, while *Yu Yu Hakusho* featured sprites that scaled as fighters moved in and out of the background. And for the Nintendo DS version of *Bangai-O*, Treasure even took a leaf out of the halcyon days of cassette-based gaming, implementing the Sound Load system, which enabled players to transmit user-created levels to each other as sound files. It's a neat, funny touch that acknowledges Treasure's part in keeping videogame history alive, and it is yet another example of the company's lateral thinking and cleverness.

Indeed, more than anything else, Treasure's games are about gameplay innovation. They are overflowing with it, from the mix-and-match weapons in *Gunstar Heroes* to the abundance of ingenious level designs in *Bangai-O Spirits*, which cover everything from remakes of classic games to hilariously abbreviated bullet hell. You could hide your health bar in *Alien Soldier* to make it more challenging, and the game starred an eagle-headed hero who could teleport across the screen and straddle ceilings. *Dynamite Headdy*'s protagonist could fire off his head to use it as a projectile weapon. *Silhouette Mirage*, meanwhile, introduced the black/white polarity that would make such a stunning return, first in *Radiant Silvergun* and then in *Ikaruga*, allowing players to steer into enemy bullets of their current colour to charge up their weapons. And while *Freak Out*/*Stretch Panic* might not have won many plaudits, the stretchy scarf feature was surely worth a try.

Invest in gaming gold

Perhaps unsurprisingly, such a strong back catalogue and such an idiosyncratic approach to game design has engendered a particularly loyal fan base for Treasure's games. After all, it's not like you can get



» [Wii] Both *Sin And Punishment* games proved the perfect showcase for the art style of Yasushi Suzuki.





» [Mega Drive] The game that started it all, *Gunstar Heroes* – proving beyond doubt that Japanese box art is the best.



» [GBA] Many of Treasure's licensed games have been hit or miss, but *Astro Boy* packs a rocket-fuelled punch.

TAKE DAT!

When Treasure decided to transpose its swords-and-sorcery Saturn beat-'em-up, *Guardian Heroes*, to Xbox Live, the company ran into an unexpected problem. "When we were done with the Sega Saturn version we stored all of the source code onto DAT [Digital Audio Tape]," explains Maegawa. "So at the beginning of the project we had to retrieve the source code, but we had no environment to read the tapes! So actually we had to borrow equipment from Sega – and Sega had to gather various different parts from different divisions so that we could create one complete environment to play them back. But somehow we were able to retrieve the source code."

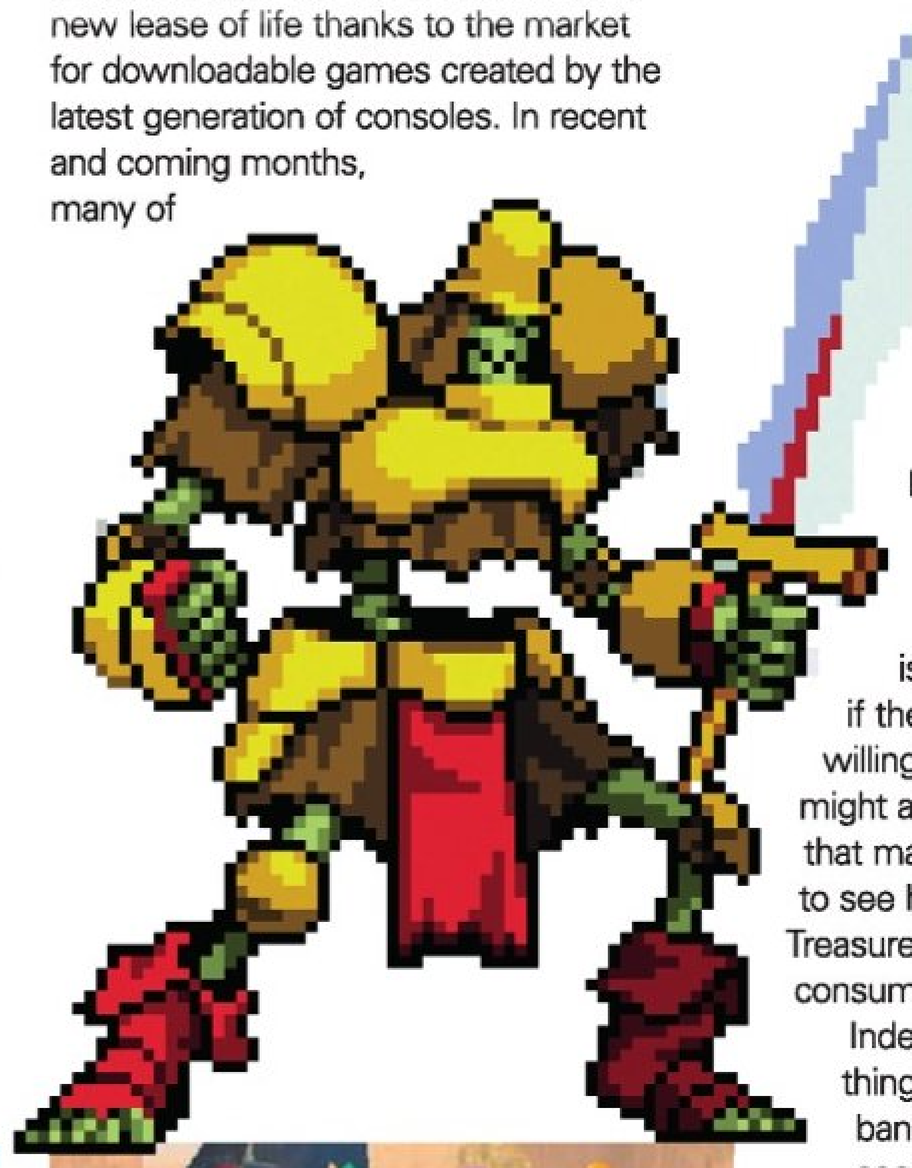
Adapting that source code to the Xbox 360, however, was apparently pretty straightforward, which means that the conversion will feature everything in the original – and more, thanks to an online 12-player battle mode. So if you have yet to play the game, there's a treat in store for you.



this stuff anywhere else. Again, though, this is something that Maegawa identifies as a happy accident rather than the product of any calculated planning – a happy accident that he traces back to that overarching guiding philosophy. "It's down to our policy of creating the games that we want to create," he says. "We generally stay focused in one direction, and gamers who are looking in the same direction – for those players, Treasure's games are what they love the most, so they stick with us for such a long time. We go our own way, so those who love that way will be loyal followers, and that's how we want to continue."

Indeed, long may it remain so. But that loyal fan base does have one downside: it tends to drive prices up for Treasure games whenever they're sold on. There have been several specific instances that limited the availability of Treasure games, such as the rumoured fallout with *Rakugaki Showtime* publisher Enix, which saw the game pulled from the shelves almost immediately after its release. But the general underlying reason for the small print runs of Treasure games is simply the size of the company's target market. "We don't tend to receive many orders, so there always seem to be slightly more fans than there are games ordered," says Maegawa. "And if all those fans buy the game the supply gets shorter, and that's the reason why games like *Radiant Silvergun* still have a premium price when you see it sold on web auctions."

Recently, however, the company's back catalogue has been undergoing a new lease of life thanks to the market for downloadable games created by the latest generation of consoles. In recent and coming months, many of Treasure's games have been or will be released on the Wii's Virtual Console, the PlayStation Network and Xbox Live Arcade. Perhaps those prohibitive eBay prices will eventually become a thing of the past, which, if it lowers the barrier to entry for becoming a Treasure fan, can surely only be a good thing for both gamers and the company.



And what of other new markets, such as the iPhone or Android? Will Treasure be bringing its retro sensibilities to those platforms? Perhaps, says Maegawa. "Xbox Live Arcade and the PlayStation Network look like very good platforms for our future," he says. "At the same time, for iPhone and Android, as long as the spec is good enough for our games, and if the owners of those platforms are willing to play Treasure games, those might also be good, but until we can tell if that market is there, we will have to wait to see how it turns out. As a company, Treasure would like to stick with the consumer platforms."

Indeed, perhaps the most admirable thing about Maegawa and his fellow band of merry pranksters is that they seem to be able to look to the future while remaining firmly committed to the historical strengths of videogames. In an industry that committed itself to the path of gaming in three dimensions a long time ago, Treasure remains a precious oddity, apparently dedicated to keeping the glories of gaming in a single plane alive, even if that plane exists in a 3D world, as in *Sin And Punishment*.

Whether it does that on the iPhone, the Xbox or the PlayStation 4, here's hoping the company manages to keep its retro-flavoured games alive for another few decades at least.



» [GBA] *Gunstar Super Heroes* was universally praised but met with a tepid commercial reception.

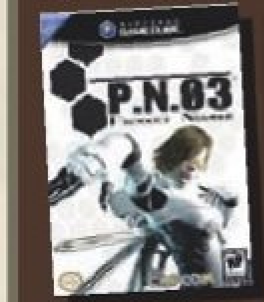


» [GameCube] Despite its long association with Sega, Treasure was able to team up with Nintendo in making *Wario World*.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come





INFO

- **Featured System:** GameCube
- **Year Released:** 2003
- **Publisher:** Capcom
- **Developer:** In-house
- **Key People:** Shinji Mikami (director) Hiroyuki Kobayashi (producer) Makoto Tomozawa (composer)

GO DEEPER

- **Vanessa Z Schneider was originally going to have a gun. It was dropped because shooting from your hands looks cooler.**
- **Director Shinji Mikami also directed *Resident Evil, Resident Evil 4* and *God Hand* for Capcom.**



11. P.N.03

Vanessa Z Schneider is one of gaming's sexist and most overlooked heroines. Darran Jones straps on an Aegis Suit, powers himself up and prepares to fight her corner

THE BACKGROUND

It was impossible to escape *P.N.03* when it was first announced, as it was part of Capcom's huge assault on videogames. After largely deserting the PS2 in favour of Nintendo's GameCube, it proudly announced the 'Capcom Five': five new games that would be exclusive to Nintendo's console. *P.N.03* was announced along with side-scrolling brawler *Viewtiful Joe*, the intriguing and achingly stylistic *killer7*, *Space Harrier* clone *Dead Phoenix*, and *Resident Evil 4*, which looked a lot different to the final product. Out of all these games, three were later ported to the PlayStation2 (something which greatly angered GameCube owners), while *Dead Phoenix* was sadly cancelled in 2003. *P.N.03* remained the only GameCube exclusive, and arguably the most misunderstood title out of all five games.

Originally known as *Robot War Game* during its planning stages, it was just five days into production before Shinji Mikami realised that the game needed a drastic rethink. "We put the graphics on the TV screen [and] it shocked me bad…" he recalled in a developer diary for the game's website. "I didn't feel any hot feelings from the screen. If it is a war game, it's supposed to make the user feel hot, but from the screen, I didn't feel anything. So I had to change the direction of the game. It wasn't too bad, but for me, I didn't feel anything from it."

Mikami got back to work and *P.N.03* was eventually released just four months after it was announced. Judging by the fact we're still impressed by this forgotten gem, we'd argue that most people simply don't understand Vanessa's oh-so-ample charms.

THE GAME

If Capcom's *Devil May Cry*, which preceded *P.N.03* by two years, was all about movement, then *P.N.03* was all about standing still – albeit doing it as stylishly as possible.

P.N.03's levels are split into smaller arenas, all featuring a set amount of enemies, which must be defeated before Vanessa can move on to the next

Things of note







Big bad bosses

Vanessa has to face off against a large number of metal beasts throughout her hardcore adventure. Predictably they get bigger, tougher and nastier the further she progresses.

The Aegis Suit

It might look like a sexy catsuit, but Vanessa's Aegis Suit hides some powerful weaponry. As the game progresses, you can get your hands on more outlandish versions of it.

Oh-So-Stylish

Watching Vanessa in action really is a thing off beauty. Incredibly lithe and armed with ridiculously spectacular moves, she's a sexy force of nature to be reckoned with.

Say what now?

If you're hoping for an engaging story, look elsewhere. *P.N.03*'s plot is so preposterously silly that you'll be left bewildered and completely clueless after the credits roll.

P.N.03 The Sequel

Take away the annoying Snake wannabe and the truly atrocious dialogue, and it's safe to say that Mikami's supremely nutty *Vanquish* is the true successor to *P.N.03*.



» [GameCube] *P.N.03* was the only game in the 'Capcom Five' not to receive a PS2 port.



» [GameCube] *P.N.03* was far from a runaway success, selling 10,000 copies in Japan and 13,000 in North America.



What the press thought



gamesTM
Score: 6/10
"For all its faults *P.N.03* still manages to be a curiously compelling title."



Gaming Target
Score: 4.6/10
"Repetitive. Boring. Tedious. Slow. Underachieving."

section. The levels are incredibly well-designed and, after a bit of practice, the patterns of the enemies show themselves to be extremely clever, enabling you to rack up some pretty impressive scores once you master *P.N.03*'s control system.

Vanessa is an amazingly athletic creation, who, even when she's rooted to the spot shooting at enemies, just can't stay still. Whether she's clicking her fingers to a beat only she seems able to hear, or suggestively undulating her hips while she mows down huge drones, her movements remain strangely hypnotic, and it becomes almost impossible to tear your eyes away from her constantly moving arse cheeks.

Avert your eyes you must, however, as *P.N.03*'s assault is relentless, with enemy drones throwing all manner of vicious attacks at the lithe beauty. Luckily, Vanessa is more than equipped to handle them, thanks to constantly upgradeable Aegis Suits that give her some impressive mobility and ridiculous over-the-top attacks. Many didn't understand *P.N.03*'s controls, calling them clunky and unwieldy, but this couldn't be further than the truth. *P.N.03* is all about reacting to attacks and using strategically placed struts and barriers top dodge incoming fire. It's an extremely elegant system once you understand it, and it becomes even more rewarding once you become familiar with *P.N.03*'s scoring system.



Like the very best shoot-'em-ups, *P.N.03* is all about mastering the combo system. Shoot an enemy and you'll have a set amount of time to reach and destroy the next one and clear your combo. It's a deeply rewarding experience, particularly once you realise that you're given more time for shooting certain enemies first. It's effectively a shoot-'em-up for the 3D generation, which may explain why it received such unfair and lacklustre press at its time of release.

Many complained about the short length of the game, but of course that's part-and-parcel of a traditional shooter, and, as Capcom constantly rewarded you with more and more impressive Aegis Suits to unlock, there was always a reason to return to *P.N.03* for one last playthrough. It's quite possibly one of the most misunderstood and underrated gems of last generation, and that truly saddens us.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

At its purest, *P.N.03* is nothing more than an extremely addictive shoot-'em-up, and like the best shoot-'em-ups it offers endless replayability that constantly draws you back for one more go. While it's all too easy to scoff at the drab-looking (but undeniably stylish) visuals and the repetitive enemy designs, to do so is to completely misunderstand what makes Vanessa tick. If you're prepared to look underneath its skin, you'll discover some extremely clever enemy placement that enables you to pull off some truly spectacular scores – providing that you're prepared to put the effort in. As he later did with *God Hand*, Mikami effectively redesigned a popular genre into something utterly new and stylish, and many just didn't appreciate it.

P.N.03 is a game that constantly challenges you to take risks and rewards you when you do so, and for that reason we'll always love it.

Minority Report

Over the last few generations, gaming platforms have come and gone, and some have made a great impact; others perhaps less so. Darran Jones looks at hidden gems available on some of the less mainstream systems, and cult games on some of the more well-known…



PIECES

■ SYSTEM: SUPER NINTENDO ■ DEVELOPER: PRISM KIKAKU ■ YEAR: 1994

» SUPER NINTENDO



» [SNES] The low resolution visuals mean some puzzles are more difficult to complete than others.

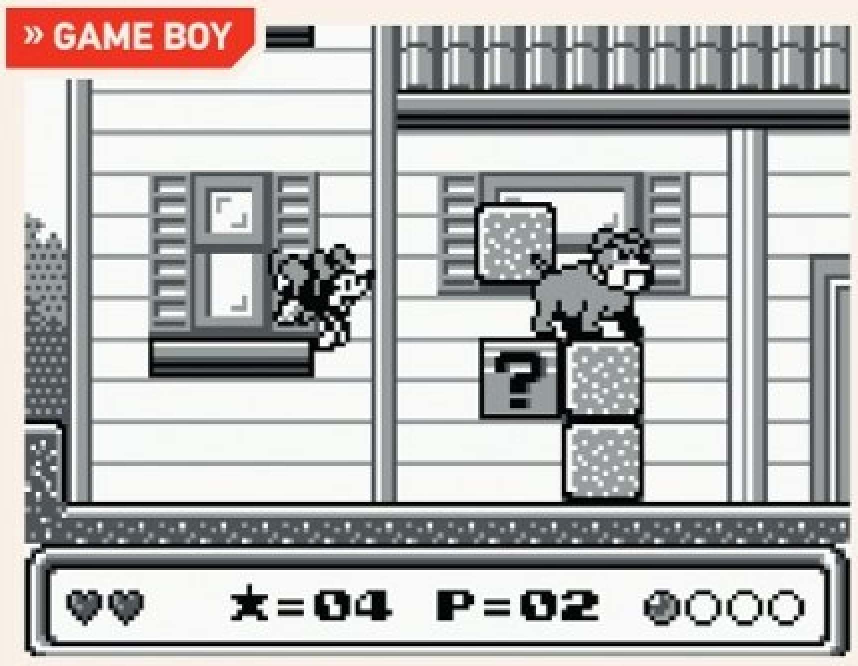
■ ***Pieces* sounds like it should be a recipe for disaster. After all it's a versus puzzle game where you must complete a puzzle as quickly as possible. Boring, right? Well, no. It's actually an amazing slice of ingenuity that will turn friend against friend, and which proves that even the most boring-sounding of subjects can be turned into an extremely entertaining videogame.**

The core of *Pieces* is to complete puzzles as quickly as possible. There are three difficulty modes governed by a motley crew of nutty creations ranging from a sharp-sighted crab to a geeky stereotype. The screen is separated into two sections, which contain a 6x4 puzzle grid, a power-bar and timer, seven power-up slots and a section showing your next three puzzle pieces. It's then simply a case of putting down puzzles pieces as quickly as possibly and completing your picture.

The quicker you correctly lay puzzle pieces, the faster you'll fill your power-bar. As your bar increases, you'll gain access to a number of different power-ups. Initially they're pretty simple, either highlighting where you should stick pieces, or showing a subtle background of the image, which makes placing pieces far easier.

As you fill your power-bar, things become more exciting, and you'll get a range of power-ups that do everything from reversing the controls, to offering a handy helper, or erasing your opponent's pieces. Add the fact that the stronger power-ups rotate, and a surprising layer of strategy gets added, as you work out when it's best

» GAME BOY



» MICKEY'S DANGEROUS CHASE

■ SYSTEM: GAME BOY
■ DEVELOPER: KOTOBUKI SYSTEMS ■ YEAR: 1992

■ **The Game Boy** was full of platformers, making it difficult to sort the wheat from the chaff. We'll save you the hassle by recommending *Mickey's Dangerous Chase*. While the storyline is dull, the platforming is solid, if a little difficult in places. Most levels are fairly conventional, but later levels feature boat sections, driving stages and a section where you descend a mountain by leaping on handily placed eagles. It's not an easy game by any means, but if you're after a challenge you won't be disappointed.

» APPLE

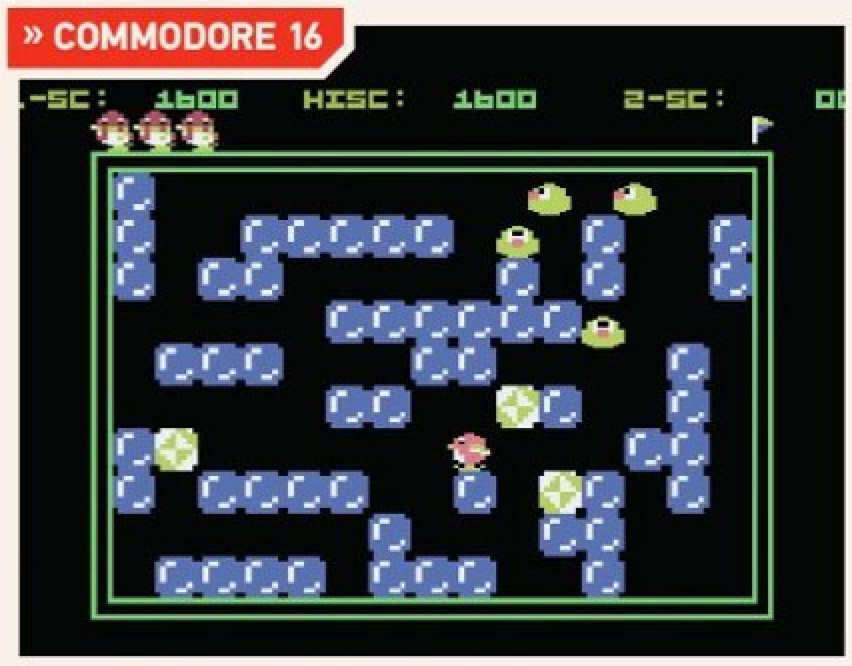


» FAT CITY

■ SYSTEM: APPLE ■ DEVELOPER: RICHARD HEFTER/ STEVE WORTHINGTON ■ YEAR: 1983

■ **Now here's a** game that we'd love to see a modern day version of. *Fat City* puts you in the boots of a wrecking ball driver, with the simple aim of levelling as many buildings as possible. It's a basic enough premise, but works amazingly well because smashing up stuff is fun. There's a tiny smidgen of strategy as well, as it's important to watch your power bar on the right hand side of the screen. Everytime you swing your ball (or you are hit by debris) it depletes, meaning you only have a set amount of time to score as many points as possible. A clever game let down by slightly sluggish controls.

» COMMODORE 16



» PANIC PENGUIN

■ SYSTEM: COMMODORE 16
■ DEVELOPER: COLOSOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1984

■ **It's another month** and we've uncovered yet another clone for the underrated C16. *Panic Penguin*, or *Petch* as it's known on its title screen, is a clone of the Sega-published *Pengo*. Gameplay is identical, as you're presented with a top-down maze that contains a number of blocks and roaming enemies. Progress is made by shunting blocks and using them to crush foes, and once you've pushed the three diamond blocks together you can move to the next level. It's a little slow-paced and flickery, and not a patch on the C64 version (which appears to be called *Pengo*), but it's an acceptable translation of Coreland's original.

» [SNES] Got an unused SNES mouse? You'll be pleased to hear *Pieces* supports it.



» [SNES] The icon on the left shows that your controls are reversed. Very annoying.





» ABOUT THE SYSTEM

- The Super Nintendo was first released in 1990 in Japan and launched with *Super Mario World* and *F-Zero*
- Its use of Mode seven, enabled the SNES to impressively rotate and scale graphics
- The SNES supported a number of peripherals, including the Super Game Boy and the Super Scope

to use a specific power-up.

There are a total of 21 different puzzles to complete, spread across seven themes that range from pictures of dinosaurs, to planes, and famous sports. The quality of the pictures can sometimes make it a little tricky to work out where certain pieces should be placed, but as each opponent has the same three pictures each time, it soon becomes second nature to identify each particular piece.

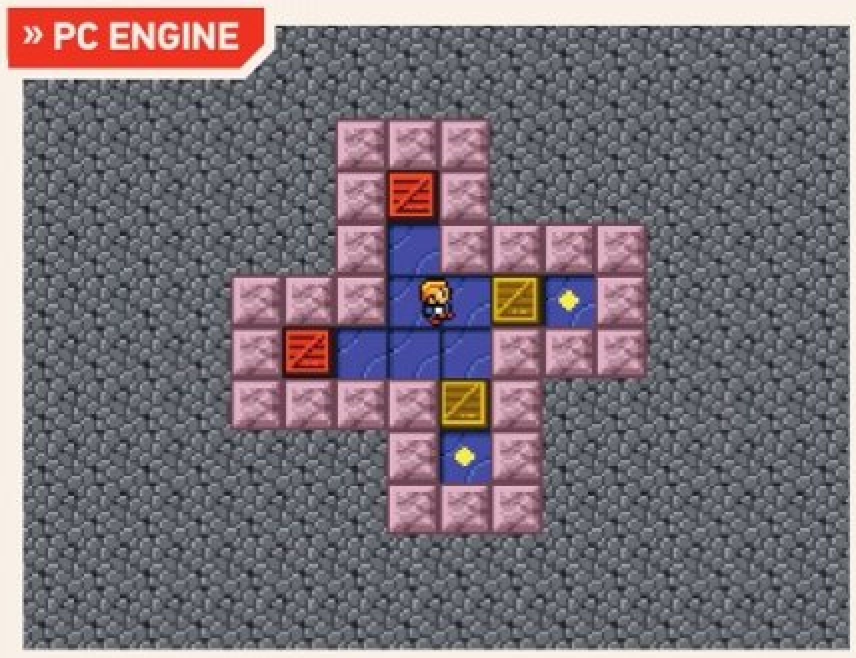
In addition to the core versus mode – either against the computer or a second player – there's an additional All Play mode that allows you to tackle a bigger version of the 21 different puzzles. You can set a time limit – up to eight minutes – decide whether you want to include fake pieces and then start play. The action takes place on a larger 6x6 grid, so you'll be able to see your next five pieces and a smaller image of the completed puzzle appears in the bottom right hand corner of the screen. One final nice touch is how you can play against a second player – you'll get more points for laying puzzle pieces as quickly as possible – which adds further longevity to the main two-player mode.

Pieces isn't without its problems – the low resolution visuals can make placing certain pieces very difficult, while the final difficulty level is ludicrously tough – but it remains an extremely challenging game, particularly when playing against another player. Although unreleased in Europe, the relatively straightforward nature of the game makes the Super Famicom version an option, if you can't get hold of the US edition.



» [SNES] Your computer opponent has a helper here who places additional pieces. Again, very annoying.

» PC ENGINE



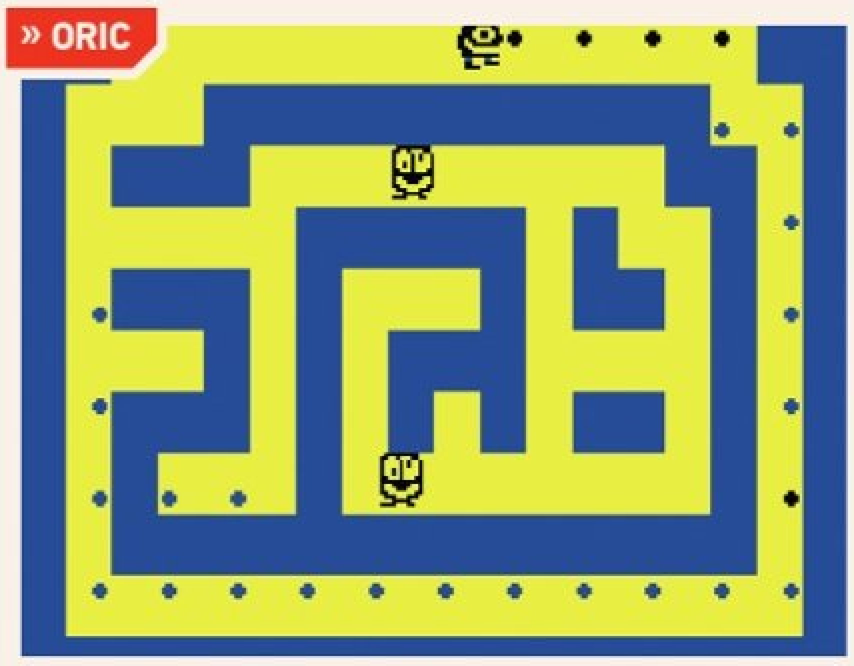
» BOXY BOY

■ SYSTEM: PC ENGINE
■ DEVELOPER: MEDIA RINGS CORP ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **First created by** Hiroyuki Imabayashi in 1981, Thinking Rabbit's *Sokoban* has gone onto appear on a number of different consoles and home computers. The PC Engine's version was *Boxy Boy*, or *Sokoban World* as it was known in Japan, and it's a great take on the popular puzzle game.

At the beginning of each stage you're presented with a number of crates and are shown where you need to move them. Correctly line up every box and you go to the next stage. It sounds easy, but the fiendish design means it's anything but. With an impressive 250 levels, it'll take an age to master.

» ORIC



» DON'T PRESS THE LETTER Q

■ SYSTEM: ORIC
■ DEVELOPER: ANDREW MOORE ■ YEAR: 1984

■ **Predating the Game** Boy Advance's *WarioWare* series by a good 19 years, *Don't Press The Letter Q* is an intriguing multiplayer game that is as baffling as it is entertaining. Playable with up to eight friends, you begin in a maze with rooms taking you to various games. Games include *Pac-Man* and *Tron* light-cycle clones, but you'll often be dumped into a task with no initial idea of what to do. It's all part of the fun, as the game becomes frantic when pitted against friends. A charming, inventive game with plenty of replay value.

» MSX



» SNAKE IT

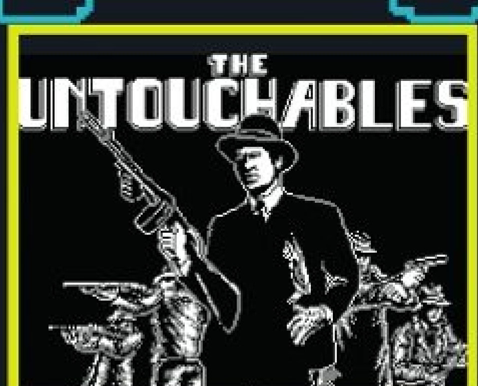
■ SYSTEM: MSX
■ DEVELOPER: RONALD PIEKET ■ YEAR: 1986

■ **Although it sprang** to popularity on mobile phones, *Snake* has actually been around since the late Seventies. This version for the MSX is good fun and boasts bold, cutesy visuals, tight responsive controls and plenty of replayability. Starting off in the centre of the screen, you simply have to eat as many flowers as possible without accidentally swallowing poisonous mushrooms. The more flowers you eat, the bigger you grow, and care must be taken to ensure that you don't back yourself into a corner from which you can't escape. There are also power-ups to collect and the whole game has a slick, arcadey feel.

The Untouchables



One of Ocean's last Eighties movie tie-ins, Stuart Hunt begins an investigation about The Untouchables, and pushes Gary Bracey and programmer James Higgins for answers



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **PLATFORMS:** SPECTRUM, CPC, C64, AMIGA, PC, NES, SNES
- » **GENRE:** MOVIE TIE-IN

Is there a science to creating a good videogame tie-in? We'd argue the case that there is, and put it to you that Ocean Software proved the formula could be captured. Of its biggest videogames based on blockbusters – *RoboCop, Batman: The Movie* and *The Untouchables* – the latter release might have been the least successful, but in terms of offering a faithful replication of the action captured on celluloid it was arguably the most exemplary of the three.

Having reared a couple of licensed turkeys at the start of the Eighties, with its interactive *Highlander* and *Knight Rider* cassette tapes mystifying everyone remotely familiar with the properties, thankfully it didn't take long for things at Ocean Software to take a dramatic turn for the better. Joining the company at the time that those two infamous games were midway through development, Gary Bracey was brought in to oversee projects at Ocean and quickly became concerned about the state of play (literally) at the company. With both *Highlander* and *Knight Rider* being developed by external freelancers, he identified that the culture at Ocean had to change dramatically if the standard of licensed game tie-ins was to improve. To help a better class of product emerge from its gates, Gary set about growing in-house development at Ocean, in order to allow greater control and observation of game projects that would have previously been outsourced to contracted coders. Like Eliot Ness – leader of the US Treasury's Untouchables prohibition enforcement squad – he shook things up by putting together a crack team.

In 1985 Ocean secured the game rights to the films *Rambo, Short Circuit* and a then-little unknown quantity from Orion Pictures called *RoboCop*. Part of Gary's role at







» [CPC] All the 8-bit versions of the game play great. But if you're looking for the version that looks like the entire films takes place at night, we suggest taking the Amstrad port for a spin.



Ocean was to read and inspect the scripts sent to the company for consideration, and, after reading the script to *RoboCop*, Gary's feeling was that the picture could go one of two ways: it would either go on to become a massive hit or its B-Movie qualities would see it fade into straight-to-video obscurity… promptly followed by a more obscure computer game. As we all know, Gary decided to take a punt on the script and the movie became a box-office sensation, raking in $8 million in its opening weekend in the US. And, when Ocean did an excellent number on the movie's videogame adaptation, the game flew off retail shelves quicker than you could say 'Lose the arm!'.

One of the most successful Spectrum games of all time, and the most successful release in Ocean's history, *RoboCop* marked an important turning point for the developer and the business of videogame licensing. Following *RoboCop*'s unprecedented videogame success, licensed games were fast becoming one of the most lucrative and popular game genres of the Eighties, and Ocean soon found itself the go-to company for the biggest movie studios looking to turn their intellectual properties into slices of interactive entertainment.

Ocean's new circle of Hollywood friends included massive movie mill Paramount Pictures. First approaching Ocean to develop a videogame adaptation of its USAF-recruitment-video-posing-as-action-flick *Top Gun* in 1987, the studio then asked it to adapt Brian De Palma's forthcoming star-riddled prohibition mob epic *The Untouchables*. Gary recounts the point where Ocean acquired the license:

"We had a good relationship with Paramount, but it was offered to us quite late on," remembers Gary. "In fact, I think the film was actually in post-production when we acquired the license. We got to see an unfinished cut of the final film, which had a couple of missing scenes and effects – the part where Frank Nitti fell from the high-rise building was quite amusing without all the special effects."

Development on *The Untouchables* began around the same time that the film opened in theaters. The Spectrum and Amstrad versions of the game were created by programmer James Higgins and artist Martin McDonald; the C64 game was worked on by John Meegan and artist Stephen Thompson; and the ST and Amiga 16-bit versions were outsourced to Liverpool-based software house Special FX Software. Jonathan Dunn wrote and composed the music, doing a sterling job in capturing the moody, gritty tone of the film and repeating the same magic he had performed previously for *RoboCop*.

"We got to see an unfinished cut of the film, which had a couple of missing scenes and effects"

Gary left that early screening of the movie an instant fan. He reminisces: "The combination of De Palma, Costner, Connery and DeNiro… plus the Chicago mob. How could you not love it?" He also felt the star-studded picture contained several memorable action sequences that could be used to base a number of exciting gameplay elements on. This was all that was needed to convince him that Ocean could do something special with the property, and so work quickly started on adapting *The Untouchables* from the big screen to microcomputer monitors.

It wasn't just the game's music that played loudly to its cinema origins, either: the entire game was presented as a movie, to the extent that the opening credits in the Spectrum version listed James and Martin as directors, and other developers were credited for more whimsical roles, such as Wardrobe and Pedantic Criticism. Programmer Colin Porch was even listed as Best Boy.

Save for a copy of the script and the usual production stills, Gary and James told us that Ocean received very little in the way of input and assets from Paramount Pictures, and



ELIOT SNES

SOME OF YOU may be unaware that Ocean actually out a second game based on *The Untouchables* property. It was based on the remake of the original Sixties television series that aired in the States in 1993, and was released for the Super Nintendo in North America the following year.

Despite having no connection with Brian De Palma's movie, it does feature a selection of similar-feeling levels to Ocean's 1989 game; for instance, a side-scrolling level set in a warehouse where Ness has to collect evidence, and an over-the-shoulder shooting level. The game even ends with a rooftop gun fight – oddly against Al Capone himself.

Curious to find out more, we ask James and Gary if they knew anything about the game. Sadly, Gary explained that he knew nothing about it as it was produced around the same time as he left Ocean. James, however, remembered a little more.

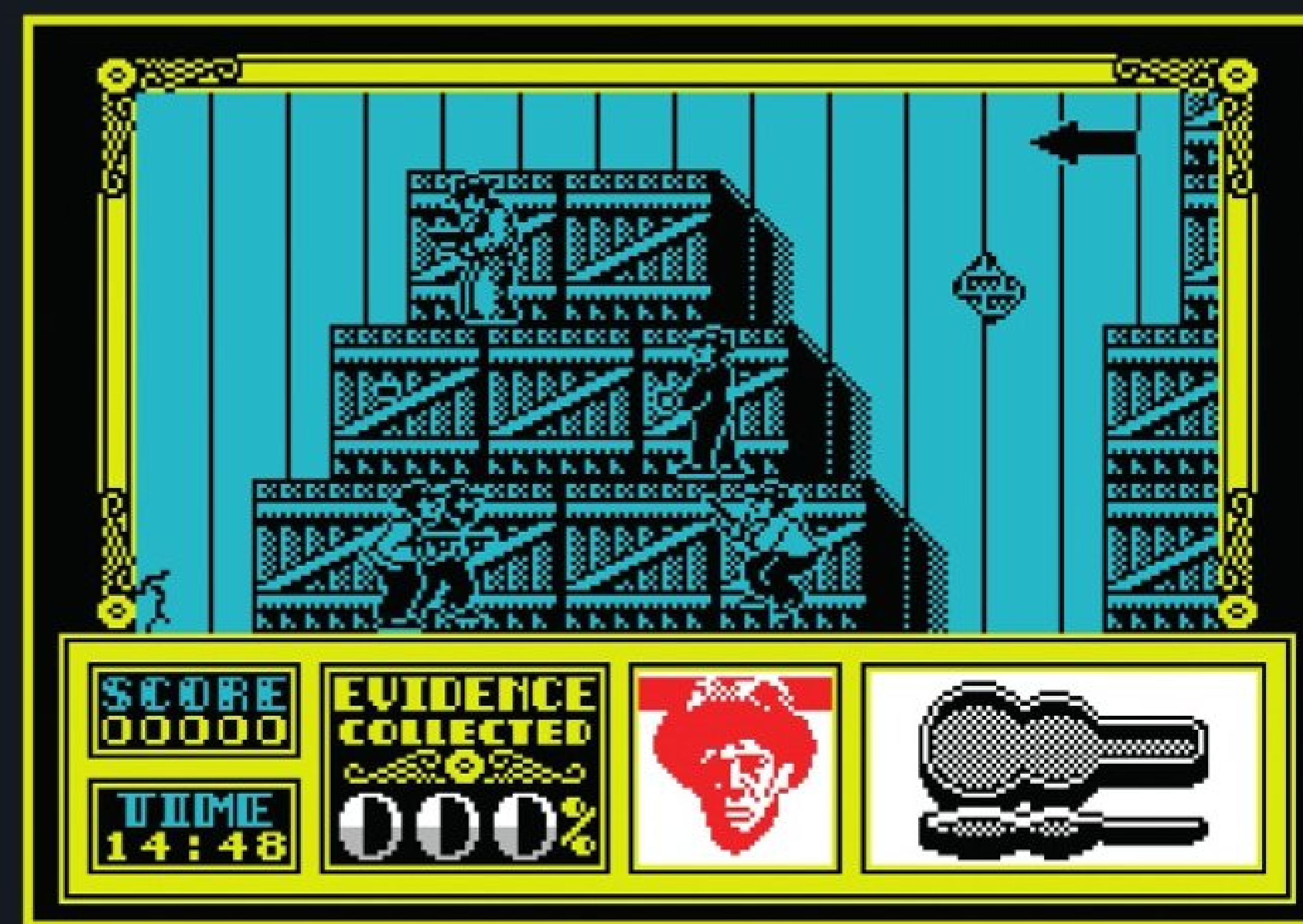
"I'm fairly sure this was developed by Ocean of America, probably by the old Painting By Numbers crew who'd relocated there along with Jon Dunn. I guess that with Eliot Ness and the Untouchables being very American-centric, management figured it would be a perfect title for Ocean of America."





» [Amiga] The 16-bit versions of *The Untouchables* were outsourced to Special FX. They play identically to the 8-bit versions, but benefit from having some beautifully detailed graphics.





» [ZX Spectrum] Legendary composer Jonathan Dunn wrote the music for the game. It's a nice mix of tense-sounding compositions and lighthearted ragtime ditties, which complements the movie's iconic Ennio Morricone score nicely.

no direction regarding how the game should look and play. The film studio was happy to leave Ocean to its own devices, bar one stipulation:

"We were forbidden from using Costner's likeness within the game, if I recall correctly", says Gary. "We just had to base the game on the memory of the screening. But the usual script and official stills were as much as we were given."

While poor Kevin was left out in the cold at the request of Paramount, everything else in the picture was fair game, and it would be fair to say was used. Indeed, the game's design stuck so close to the events in the movie that we would go so far as to claim that *The Untouchables* was the most faithful film-to-videogame adaptation Ocean put out. So how exactly did the team decide which scenes from the picture to include in the game?

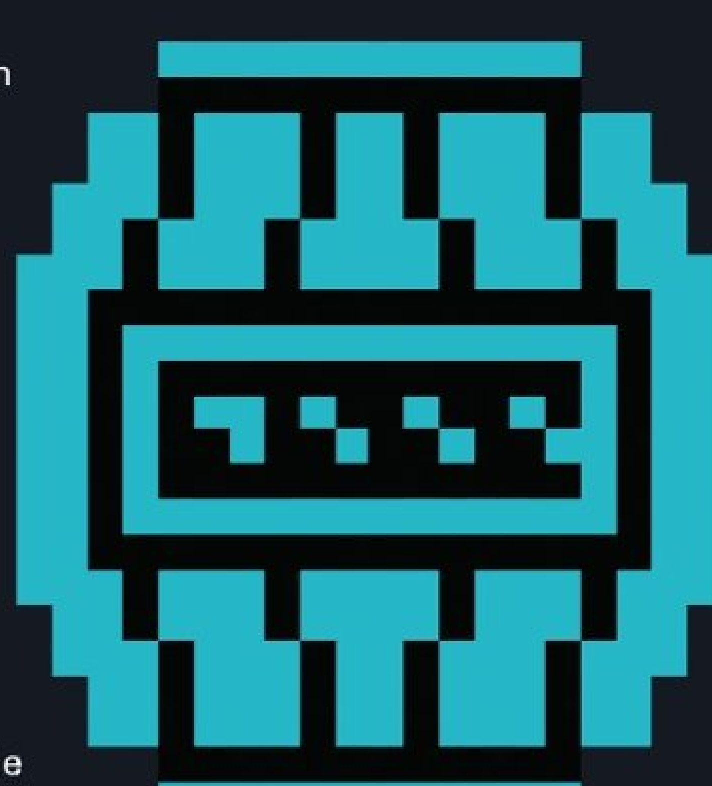
"I organised a 'round table' discussion, whereby we took collective opinions of which scenes would work best and how they might be implemented." explains Gary. "There were some very iconic moments in that film, and so we felt it would be good to incorporate as many as possible. Because of the variety of these, I elected from the beginning to make this a 'multi-style' game, but the main design input came from the team of developers behind it."

Set across six levels that encompassed a variety of gameplay styles, *The Untouchables* was brimming with diversity and fan-service. Mirroring the structure of the movie almost to the letter, the game's opening level saw Ness raiding a Chicago Warehouse, where the resolute prohibition agent had to battle with armed mobsters while trying to secure incriminating evidence of Capone's illegal dealings. From here, the action followed on to the newly-banded Untouchables' first mission together, where, taking position on a bridge, they tired to prevent bootleggers from smuggling booze across the US/Canadian border. Many other memorable scenes from the movie were impressively digitised in *The Untouchables*, and everybody had their favourite section in the game.

"I like the alley section the most," says James, "mostly for aesthetic reasons – I thought it looked cool, and still does for its time. With the versions I did, my least favourite has to be the train station steps – it's not particularly well-executed, I feel, and not especially appealing to look at either.

With the action switching from side-scrolling run-and-gun one minute to a unique third-person *Operation Wolf*-style shooter the next, the beauty and success of *The*

"It looked terrific, played well and provided a number of varied and compelling gameplay elements"





DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ROBOCOP (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMIGA, ST, C64, CPC, SPECTRUM, GAME BOY, NES
YEAR: 1988

ADDAMS FAMILY
SYSTEM: AMIGA, ST, C64, CPC, SPECTRUM, GAME BOY, NES, SNES, SMS, MEGA DRIVE, GAME GEAR
YEAR: 1992

NAVY SEALS
SYSTEM: AMIGA, ST, C64, CPC, GAME BOY
YEAR: 1991



Untouchables was undoubtedly the fact that you were never quite sure where its gameplay was going to take you next. Of course, that wasn't strictly true: as we said, if you had already seen the film then you knew exactly what was to come, as the game clung to the source material like dirty fingerprints.

While the distinct levels and varied gameplay helped to keep the action interesting and engaging, the practicality of developing a game made up of distinct sections and different gameplay styles understandably took time to pull together. As such, this resulted in *The Untouchables* taking longer to finish than typical projects being brewed at Ocean.

"Well, this one took an absolute age," recalls James. "We were typically cranking titles out every three months, and this was closer to nine. I guess with all of the sections being quite distinct, and each being a full load, nine months wasn't too bad. I don't recall any major headaches affecting its development. My biggest fear at the time was that it was taking so long to make that they might can it – and me with it."

But the clear hard work and efforts of the team that worked on the game didn't go unnoticed. Released in 1989 to coincide with the film's UK video release, *The Untouchables* was praised by the gaming press for its combination of great visuals, excellent music, and the surprising variety and imagination found in its gameplay. Scoring an impressive 94 per cent in *Crash*, and receiving the exact same score (but in degrees) in the pages of *YS*, it marked another successful tie-in by Ocean – one that certainly lived up to the quality of its other cinematic greats, *RoboCop* and *Batman: The Movie*.

Looking back some twenty years after the game's release, we end our line of questioning by asking James and Gary if they were happy with how the finished game turned out, and if they were surprised by the positive reaction it received.

"It's great to get a good review, although I'm not really sure it warrants the scores it received," James answers. "I guess for the time it was different from a lot of the titles that existed, and reviewers probably welcomed the change of pace. I've not looked at it for 20-plus years so my memory is clouded by being sick of the whole thing after nine months of staring at it every single day. I was just happy to be done with it, and moving onto a newer and more interesting game.

Echoing our thoughts on why *The Untouchables* was such a classic movie tie-in, we leave the final word to Gary:

"I thought the concept of different sequences worked extremely well. *The Untouchables* was one of the movie-based licensed games we were terribly proud of. It looked terrific, played very well and provided a number of varied and compelling gameplay elements. In fact, the whole was greater than the sum of its parts, in my opinion."



» [ZX Spectrum] Despite the yellow and teal colour scheme, the Spectrum version was packed with detail, and looked sublime.

SCENE STEALING

To prove just how faithful the game adaptation is to the film, here's our level-by-level breakdown of The Untouchables…

LEVEL 1: WAREHOUSE RAID
The game begins with a side-scrolling shooter section in which you assume the role of Eliot Ness as he makes a raid on a Chicago Warehouse. Littered with Capone's gun-toting henchmen, Ness must find ten pieces of evidence being held by ten accountants who are scattered around the playing field, distinguishable by their matching jackets.



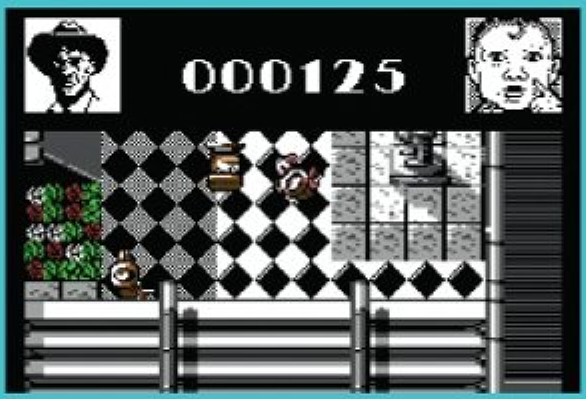
LEVEL 2: THE BRIDGE
Ness and his team are now stopping bootleggers from trafficking alcohol across the US/Canadian border. This level takes inspiration from *Operation Wolf*-style shooters, with the difference being that it's in the third person; players roll about the floor blasting holes into a procession of mobsters, and have the option to switch between the four main heroes in the film.



LEVEL 3: THE ALLEYWAY
Attempting to prevent Capone's chief accountant leaving town, Ness and the boys are cornered by Capone's men in an alleyway. Similar to the previous level, this section takes the form of a single-screen shooting gallery, where waves of mobsters appear from windows and in the alleyway, and bottles of liquor can be collected by gunning them down.



LEVEL 4: THE RAILWAY STATION
This level recreates the film's iconic stairway shootout scene (itself a brilliant homage to the 'Odessa Steps' scene from *Battleship Potemkin*), and was one of the most popular sections of the game with reviewers (even if it was James's least). It takes the form of a top-down shooter, with Ness taking out Capone's men as he tries to protect a poor baby caught in the crossfire.



LEVEL 5: THE TRAIN PLATFORM
Ness catches up with the accountant at the station platform, but discovers that one of Capone's men has gotten to him first. With the mobster threatening to blow the bookkeeper away to prevent him from testifying against Capone, Ness has a small amount of time to rescue his witness. To do this, the player must line up the barrel of a gun over his head to ensure a quick kill.



LEVEL 6: THE END
The game's final level sees Ness is locked in a tense gunfight with Capone's henchman Frank Nitti, who has pegged it to the roof of the courthouse after gunning down a hapless bailiff. Shoot Nitti several times to push him so far back he eventually falls off the side of the rooftop. With this done, you've helped Ness finish his war on prohibition. So, who fancies a stiff drink?



TOTAL ECLIPSE





ECLIPSE

When there is a total eclipse, the moon will be destroyed, wreaking havoc. You have to prevent this by lifting the curse.

ANKH

Ankhs unlock doors blocked by a horizontal bar, but you have to search for replacements – don't waste them.

£0,965,000

MONEY

Whenever you collect some treasure, your points go up. Collect as much money as you possibly can.

Following hot on the heels of *Driller* and *Darkside*, in 1988 all eyes were firmly locked on to Incentive's latest first-person 3D game, *Total Eclipse*. It used a polygonal graphics engine called Freescape, giving players freedom to explore and interact. Gamers had become familiar with the technique following the success of its predecessors and, from the moment gamers saw an aeroplane outside a pyramid and were tasked with ending a curse placed on civilisation by reaching the shrine at the top of the structure before an eclipse took place, there was an aching desire to explore all of the game's 50 locations.



BEARINGS

A 3D world can be disorientating, which is why you'll have one eye on this compass at all times.



HEART RATE

You don't want your heartbeat to speed up too much – if there are mummies in the room, you better get out fast.



HEIROGLYPHS

These icons show if you are walking or crawling, or whether you are taking tiny steps or mighty strides.



WATER

Without water, your heartbeat increases and you can die, so you need to make sure it's topped up using the troughs.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

WHY IT'S A CLASSIC



Challenge Of The Gods

Total Eclipse was produced in the days before gamers were held by the hand and, just as importantly, before the internet was the first port of call for when you become stuck. To that end, it was a real gaming challenge, pushing the boundaries of 3D gaming at the time to create a world in which you could semi-believe, and packing it with puzzles, mazes, lots of treasure and time-perfect movements. All the while, you're watching your water levels deplete, your heart race and the time ticking away. The Freescape system really came into its own with this game.

BEST CHARACTER?



Riddle Of The Sphinx

Total Eclipse doesn't have any characters other than your good self. However, the game oozes character, and that is certainly well illustrated in the Illusion areas – a set of rooms that appear rather bland but will confuse, confound and frustrate you. They draw upon every ounce of your mapping prowess and there's little chance you'll succeed without pen and paper to hand. In this section of the game, you need to move between rooms via openings in the wall, but there is no logical connection between them, and you'll spend ages working out what goes where before you emerge a shivering wreck.

BEST BOSS?



Mummy Fearest

The mummies are not bosses in the strictest of senses – they're rather static, as you can imagine, and yet they are really quite lethal. Your first encounter with a bandaged fiend will be in the Horakhty-G room, where you come to realise two things: the mummies not only shoot but also cause your heart rate to increase, and that it is the latter which will determine whether you make it through alive. By the time you're at Nephthys A and C, you'll be cursing and smashing your keyboard, with heart failure commonplace and shots ringing in your ears. Thank you, gaming gods, for game saves.

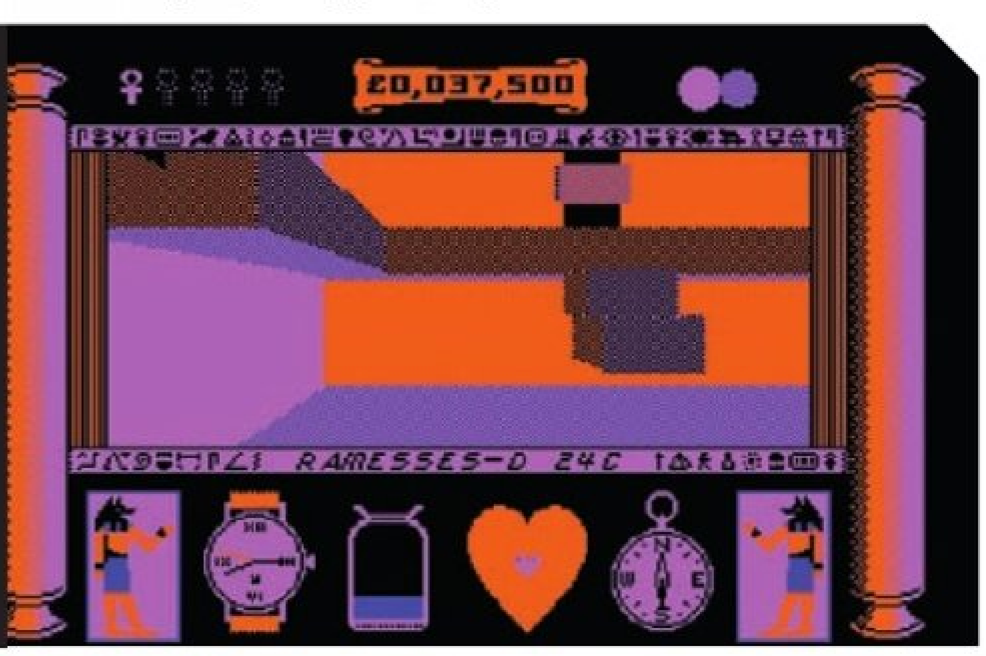
BEST MOVE?



Pyramid Schemes

The best move is that made by the developer in bringing in a raft of elements that make this game a true exploration. Do you have to duck under a blocked doorway or find and use one of many ankhs to open it? Can you shift blocks with brute force or shoot them out of the way? What's the point of a set of stairs with no exit at the top – and what difference would it make if you complete an Eye Match? *Total Eclipse* is a game of discovery and, while movement around the 3D landscape is fiddly by today's standards, it brings a whole new dimension to the gameplay.

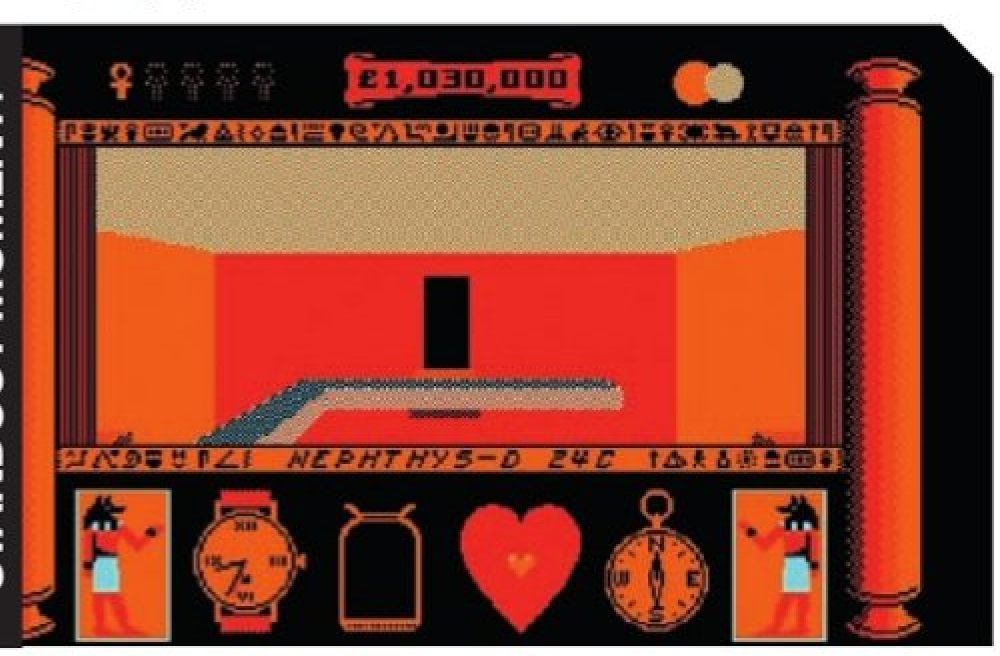
BEST STAGE?



Battering Ramesses

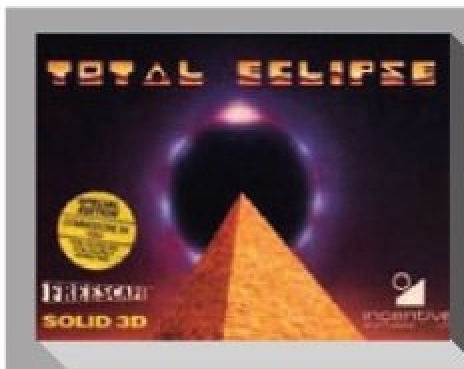
The Ramesses area contains a wealth of puzzles, raised elevations and blocked doors. Getting about was never so difficult. The puzzle contained in the Ramesses-A room requires two visits to solve, and it needs the players to enter from two different doorways. But that's not the bulk of the trouble in this area – it's game over in Ramesses-D if both ground-level doors are blocked. This stage of the game requires a great deal of cunning and thought, and much reference to your map (made all the harder by some illogical connections between rooms). It's a true test of your puzzling skills.

STANDOUT MOMENT?



Ankhs For The Memories

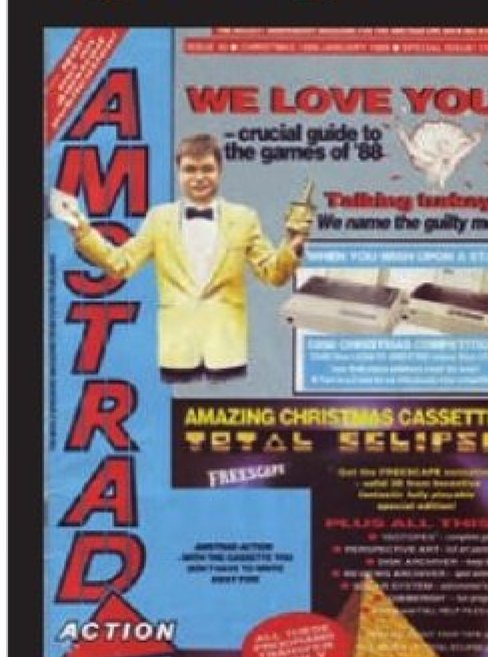
It's difficult to pin down one breathtaking moment. *Total Eclipse* is not a particularly action-filled game and it relies more on brain than brawn (which in some ways makes those heart-stopping moments jar at times). In Nephthys-D, however, there is a moment which requires a bit of forward-planning, and a handy game save as you walk across a narrow, elevated walkway from one door to another, looking down, taking small strides, being careful not to fall off. Sure, it's not a moment you'd brag about to your friends, but it's an illustration of how you need to have your wits about you at all times with *Total Eclipse*.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** PC, ST, AMIGA, C64, SPECTRUM, CPC
- **PUBLISHER:** INCENTIVE SOFTWARE LTD
- **DEVELOPER:** MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS
- **RELEASED:** 1988
- **GENRE:** ACTION-ADVENTURE

What the press said… ages ago



Amstrad Action 93%

Once in a while, we get a game that we just can't wait to get home and play all evening. This time last year it was *Driller*. Six months ago it was *Dark Side*. Now it's *Total Eclipse*.

Crash, 92%

The Freescape technique was impressive in *Driller* and *Dark Side*, but *Total Eclipse* uses it to its full potential.

What we think

Winding through puzzle-filled mazes in a fiendish hunt for treasure, *Total Eclipse* was one of those games you really could get lost in both physically and mentally.



In the chair with...

MICHEL ANCEL

You don't turn down an interview with Michel Ancel. The French developer is not only one of the most interesting and imaginative developers working in games today, but also one of the most elusive. Darran Jones travelled to Montpellier, France, to chat to the creator about his illustrious and varied career

IF THERE'S ONE thing we've learned about Michel Ancel, it's that he doesn't lack ambition. Obsessed with games from a very early age and starting his career at Ubisoft, Ancel has been the driving force behind some of the company's most interesting and unusual games. After finding huge success with Rayman, he's gone on to work with Peter Jackson, designed the highly acclaimed Beyond Good & Evil and created the incredibly popular – especially in France where they are known as Les Lapins Crétins – Raving Rabbids. We visited his studio to interview him about his eclectic career.

RETRO GAMER: What did you want to do when you were still at school?

MICHEL ANCEL: [Laughs] The answer here is very, very simple. I started making all kinds of games when I was 13, so it very quickly became my main obsession in life.

RG: So you always wanted to make games, even when you were very young?

MA: Yes. I discovered videogames when I was six or seven. It was kind of magical to me, you know? Being able to interact with your TV was great. Then at our schools in France we had computers, so we were trained to program and quickly I began to become fascinated with them. I used to love making games. I was going to school to keep my parents happy [laughs] but it was for no other reason. So I left school very early and got myself a job at Ubisoft at 16 or 17, even though I was not quite an adult.

RG: When did you become interested in computers? Was it the arrival of arcade machines?

MA: It was more to do with consoles for me. It started with the Game & Watch [makes gestures of playing on one] and the Philips Videopac. I also loved the other consoles like the Atari 2600 and the ColecoVision. This was long before the NES and the Super Nintendo. It was before all these things, but very quickly on the personal computers you were able to program your own graphics and your own games, and I moved over to this idea of working on computers. So I started using computers like the Amiga and the Atari ST.

RG: And what computer did you first learn to program on? For many developers in the UK it was computers like the ZX81.

MA: I tried to program on the Atari 800XL. Do you know this one? But it was very difficult. It was crazy. I did not have enough money at the time for a Commodore 64, so I was instead using this very simple computer, but the real work for me began when I was able to get hold of the Atari St.

RG: So how did you learn to program? Were you self-taught, or did you learn from a book?

MA: I bought a book like that [shows a measurement with fingers about four inches thick] and it was awful, really hard. Luckily, I had friends who were programming at the time, so it became very easy. We were all working together, helping each other, sharing bits of code, sharing graphics and other things like that, so it quickly became a great community of like-minded programmers and developers.

RG: One of the very first projects you worked on was a title called *Mechanic Warriors*. What can you tell us about it?

MA: It was a very, very ambitious project. It's interesting, because if you look around, you can find very early traces of this project on the internet. So if you're prepared to look you'll



SELECTED TIMELINE

Mechanic Warriors (Cancelled)
The Intruder 1989
Pick 'N Pile 1990
Brain Blaster 1990
Rayman 1995
Tonic Trouble 1999
Rayman 2: The Great Escape 1999
Rayman Arena 2001
Beyond Good & Evil 2003
Peter Jackson's King Kong 2005
Rayman Raving Rabbids 2006
Rayman Raving Rabbids 2 2007
Rayman Origins 2011
Beyond Good & Evil 2 (TBC)

"I discovered videogames when I was six or seven. It was kind of magical to me"

discover graphics that I did on *Mechanic Warriors* a very, very long time ago. I would really love to make this game now [grins to himself] because it was a very technical kind of RTS game, where you had to battle between different groups of robots. It was cool, because when you won battles you could take a piece from a defeated enemy and use this to build yourself new robots to fight with. I thought it was a very creative game, and it was to be like a mix between an arcade game and a real time strategy game. Unfortunately though, it was far too ambitious, so I was never able to finish the game and I instead moved over to far simpler games.

RG: It obviously helped get Ubisoft's attention though. Tell us how you got your job at Ubisoft.

MA: Well, there was *Mechanic Warriors*, but Ubisoft were also running a kind of competition at the time, where they were challenging programmers to demonstrate their skills. They were asking for demonstrations that showed either parts of a game or prototypes as a kind of way of recognising the strengths of a developer. I went and sent them a prototype and they eventually phoned me and said: 'Hey, do you think you could come along to us and visit our studios?' [Begins to laugh again] But at this time there was no studio, as they were actually building a studio, so I ended up becoming the first graphic artist that they hired. It was funny, because at this time I was doing art, programming and music, but they actually hired me as a graphic artist.

* FIVE TO PLAY

PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG



MICHEL ANCEL'S ADAPTATION of Peter Jackson's overblown popcorn movie remains one of the best movie licences of recent memory. While it features elements from the movie, it successfully forges its own path, and the end result is a surprisingly inventive take on the survival-horror genre, which is full of the clever touches you'd expect to find in an Ancel game. While the graphics are of an extremely high standard (it was one of the 360's first games) it's the pacing and accessibility that makes *King Kong* such a joy to play.

The tense first-person sections are meticulously handled, giving you a real sense of danger, while the third-person parts that enable you play as Kong allow you to run riot, effortlessly dispatching the enemies that proved such a problem in the first-person stages. A real gem that deserves far more praise than it gets.

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL



AS WE RECENTLY mentioned in our review of the Xbox Live Arcade version, it's the characters that make *Beyond Good & Evil* such a joy to play. Main protagonist Jade remains one of the best representations of a strong female character in the medium, while she's surrounded by strange but equally memorable companions. Yes, at its heart it's little more than a *Zelda* clone, but, unlike many other examples, Ancel obviously understands what made those games so enjoyable to play in the first place, and those same mechanics can be found in abundance throughout *Beyond Good & Evil*. Here's hoping that the ambitious sequel eventually sees release.

RAYMAN 2: THE GREAT ESCAPE



WHILE THE RECENT 3DS release is something of a rushed port, there's no denying that *The Great Escape* remains an extremely entertaining platformer. Despite the difficulty Ancel's team had during development, *Rayman 2* turned out extremely well, boasting imaginative boss fights, charming characters and plenty of additions to its traditional gameplay. It boasts far more depth than its sequel, as well as plenty of replay value, and it still looks fantastic (particularly the Dreamcast and PC versions). It was also released on a number of different systems, ranging from the 3DS to the Game Boy Color, so there are plenty of ways to enjoy *Rayman*'s entertaining sequel.

RAYMAN



MICHEL ANCEL'S LOVABLE limbless hero not only shot the French developer into the stratosphere but was also a huge success for publisher Ubisoft. While not the most original of games, its quirky characters, interesting power-ups and motley supporting cast ensures that it's still popular today. Yes, it's insanely difficult in places, but the gorgeous visuals, charming characters and entertaining gameplay (flying around on a giant mosquito, rushing down a mountainside on a frying pan) are more than enough to balance out the more difficult bits. Even today, some 15 years after its original release, it's still receiving ports: a true sign of its success and universal appeal.

PICK 'N PILE



THIS IS ONE of Ancel's earliest games and it's a collaboration with programmer Nicolas Choukroun. In addition to working on the design with Choukroun, Ancel was in charge of the game's visuals. *Pick 'N Pile* is a highly enjoyable puzzler and, in many ways, is an early predecessor of popular match-three games such as *Bejeweled* and *Zoo Keeper*. The aim of *Pick 'N Pile* is to pile together balls onto similarly coloured piles and remove every single one before the timer runs out. Physics obviously come into play, which can make larger piles a nightmare to control, but useful blocks are on hand to ensure better stacking. A clever puzzler that's insanely addictive.

RG: So you started off as a graphic artist in the industry. Did it offer you the freedom to be able to create whatever you wanted?

MA: No. In fact I really didn't like it. It was more just a job to me [than a career], you know? When you are young, you want to get your first job and you're prepared to take whatever comes along to help you get what you want.

RG: So was the graphic artist assignment more to just get your foot in the door?

MA: Yes, that's exactly right. In fact, I was a bit frustrated to begin with, because I wanted to do absolutely everything. I wanted to make the graphics, I wanted to handle all the programming, the music; so I didn't want to wait around for the other programmers, so I left. I left this one time and I created *Rayman* at home with a friend and we just worked on this project between ourselves.

RG: So how did your parents react when you told them that you were going to become a videogame programmer?

MA: I think they were a bit stressed [begins laughing again] because at this time there were no schools to learn how to programme, and so it was like a wild place and a big risk. They were like, 'Who will you be meeting? Who will be teaching you?' and things like that. The computers were basic, there were contracts and the contracts were strange and everything was different and organised in a strange way. But I liked this, because it was all new and exciting to me.

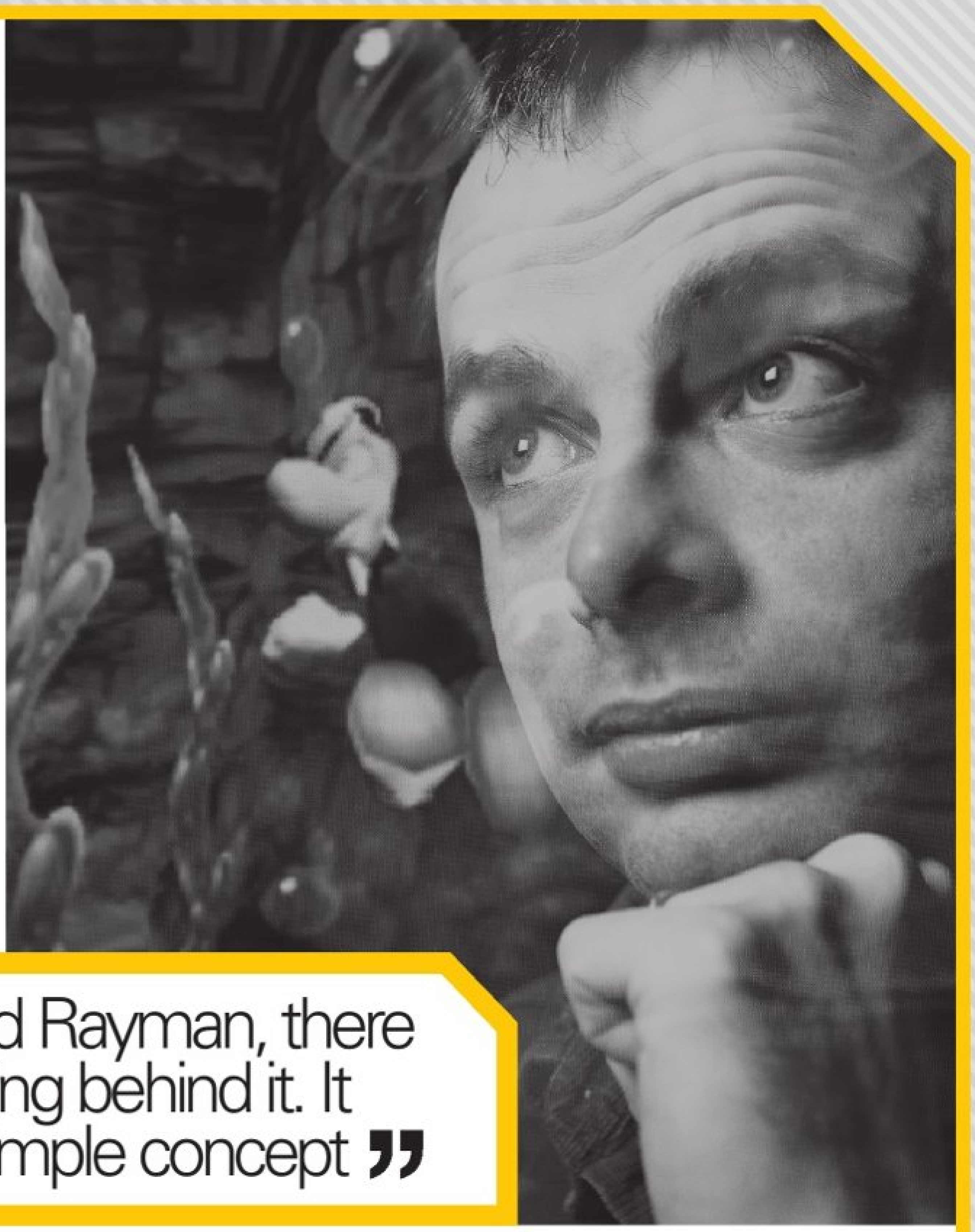


RG: So what is it you like about actual programming then? Does it allow you to be more creative?

MA: I truly think that programming is the way to really understand how a game actually works. It really allows you to understand a game's mechanics, and there is a relationship between the gameplay and the way it's done. When you have an idea about the great gameplay mechanics, you have to be very close to the programming, because you have to think of many different conditions. Can you do this? Can you do that? Will this work? It's really great when programming, because you can use this to help think in terms of logic.

RG: So how would you say the industry has changed to how it was, say, 20 years ago when you first started?

MA: I think that are now parts that are similar, but also many that are very different. It's still possible to make games with smaller groups of people, but these are typically titles for mobile phones. The other thing is that, back then, people were very, very excited about making a cool game and making a lot of money without needing millions and millions of dollars. What's different is that it's now possible to get lots of knowledge while still at school, and there's much more help when trying to get into the games industry.



> "When I created Rayman, there was no real thinking behind it. It was just a very simple concept"

RG: *Rayman* is now 15 years old. How does it feel to have created such an enduring character?

MA: It still surprises me, if I'm honest. When I created this character there was no real thinking behind it. It was just a very simple concept. First you drew it, then you animated it. I do think it's proof though that anything is possible if you put your mind to it and have enough energy to get to the end of a project. It turned into a real community project, as everybody pulled together in the same direction and we made the impossible possible. Even now, after 15 years, it's still a constant surprise to me.

RG: *Rayman 2* was highly applauded at its time for being one of the best non-Nintendo platform games. How did you find the transition from 2D to 3D?

MA: It was very, very difficult, because [*Rayman 2*] has nothing to compare it to *Rayman*. It was completely different in terms of gameplay. Because of the 3D you can't have the same gameplay mechanics. The developers also found it quite complex because it would be very hard to do things like estimate the distance, so we had to completely rewrite the gameplay, the story and other things. At the same time, we were very excited by 3D, because it was a way to enter this beautiful world of *Rayman* and to immerse the gamers in this universe. So we were really excited, about the world and the magic of 3D. The game is still *Rayman*, and it's still in the same fantasy universe, but the two games themselves are really, really different.

RG: Why do you like about creating videogames?

MA: [Laughs] That's a really good question. I think the main thing is that it reminds me very much of being The Sorceror's Apprentice. You don't really know what you're doing. You have access to all the fantastic tools, lots of technology, the artists and other developers who are making the game, but you never really know what is going to happen until you have mixed all of those things together. It's very exciting, because it's very hard to see before you finish something, because you don't always really know where you are going. You tend to know the overall direction, but you never know what you will exactly find.

Even with this game [*Rayman Origins*], which is not yet finished, we are still fine-tuning it and changing it. You can imagine part of it, but you can't really know how it's going to look. So I like the idea of *Rayman Origins* being 2D, but you don't really know how this mix of 2D and 3D will work out.

RG: So it's an organic process?

MA: Yes. If you take the new *Rayman,* for example, you are working with new developers who have their own take on *Rayman.* The way they draw him, his expressions, might be different to one that another artist would have done. So you're always bringing something new to it. It's always very surprising.

That's why it's cool for us to not work with many people, because some people can be a bit confused by our process, because we don't know exactly what we're going to do. It's not like when you're building a house with an architect and you know



*NUMBER CRUNCHING

Michel Ancel was born in **1972** and is currently **39** years old.

He was just **17** years old when he was employed as a graphic artist at Ubisoft.

Rayman was a massively successful game for Ubisoft, selling over **4 million** units on the PlayStation alone

Rayman has gone on to have **four** official sequels (including *Rayman Origins*) and **five** spin-off games.

The original *Rayman* has appeared on **nine** different systems, including Atari Jaguar, PlayStation, Sega Saturn and DSiWare.

On March **03, 2006,** Michel Ancel was knighted by French Minister of Culture and Communication Renaud Donnedieu de Vabras, as a knight of arts and literature alongside Shigeru Miyamoto and Frédérick Raynal.

80 per cent: the score Michel Ancel's *King Kong* received on Metacritic.

Rayman 2 has been unleashed on **ten** different systems including N64, Dreamcast and Game Boy Color.

> “I respect a lot of the Nintendo developers. They are the best examples for other developers to look at”

exactly what you need to do. This style is far more organic.

RG: So how did your collaboration with Peter Jackson come about?

MA: Peter Jackson is a real fan of first-person shooters and he is a videogamer. He loves videogames. The relationship was quite cosy, because he was as interested in our world as we were in his word. The collaboration was a good balance between his world and ours. He was not like, 'Hey, now here's what you need to do.' He was more like, 'Okay, you know how to do your job, I know how to do my job, this is my universe, and this is yours.' The first thing he did when we went to New Zealand was to show us the art and the movie sets, so we could see that this was the universe we needed to create. I related to it as freely as I did with games, because I knew it was a complex job. It was cool because he knew about the complexity of making games, and he was good at letting us do what was needed for the game.

RG: Where did the idea for *Beyond Good & Evil* come from?

MA: Ahhh! [laughs again] Another good question. I remember the very



» [DS] *Rayman DS* was a launch game for the hardware, and was based on the N64 game.

first thing I said to everyone. It was: 'We're going to make a game with a girl, but it's not going to be Lara Croft, because she already exists and has a strong personality and her own type of gameplay. We are going to make a game with a girl because it's going to force us to make our own type of game. The weapon is going to be a camera, and she's going to be a journalist.' Everything was an opportunity to make something different, something exciting.

RG: So how does it feel to be working on a sequel now?

MA: The second game, *Beyond Good & Evil 2*, is a game that we really want to make, but at the right time. *Beyond Good & Evil* was very special to us, because it was our first action-adventure game. With the second one we really want to be able to create the original game we first dreamed about.

RG: You like to make very ambitious games. Do you just like to think big?

MA: [Laughs] Yes. Especially for this game, because I remember when I was making the first game I was thinking of *Starglider*, which I used to play when I was a kid. I was thinking about this game, remembering, 'Wow, I can go anywhere I want and visit planets' and with the original *Beyond Good & Evil* that was really what we wanted to do, but the technology wasn't there to allow us to make such a big game. With the sequel I intend to make the game I dreamed of when I was playing *Starglider*. I don't see the old graphics of the game, I don't see the balance of the game, I don't see the limitations: I just want to explore this as freely as I want.

RG: Could you tell us where the concept of the Rabbids came from?

MA: The idea originally was for more of a *Rayman* game, but I was just fed up with creating bad guys that looked dark and looked the same. So I said: 'Okay let's take the cutest creature you can imagine and let's make it as bad as we can.' The first drawing was just a rabbit and it looked like this [makes a cute, innocent expression]. You want to go 'What is this?' and get close to it, but when you do it goes to bite you. The idea was to surprise people, and it all comes from taking something that looks innocent and cute, but turns out to be very, very stupid.

RG: You have your own children. Do you tend to find now that as your children get older you want to play games that they can play?

MA: Yes. I think it's very important that I'm able to sit down and play games with my children now. When we were making videogames a long time ago, we were really a community of gamers, and we didn't always want to play together, but I can play with my children.

RG: So how do your children feel knowing you are the creator of games that are really popular?

MA: Well they don't spend too much time here, so they are surprised when they get to see what we are doing. For them it is very exciting, and then a few weeks later they are able to test the game.

RG: So how does it feel being in charge of your own studio, and what sort of creative freedom does it give you?

MA: I would say that it's both good and bad at the same time. The good part is that, if you really want, you can make a lot of things. The bad, which is not really bad, is that now you have to take care of all these people at the same time and be sure that everybody understands what we want them to do. It can be quite hard work.

RG: So do you sometimes just think, 'I wish I could just stick



» [N64] Not everything Ancel touches turns to gold. *Tonic Trouble* is a mediocre platformer that looks tired next to *Rayman 2*.



» [XBLA] *Beyond Good & Evil* recently saw a resurgence on Xbox Live Arcade, rekindling hopes of a sequel.



» [Wii] The Rabbids are known in France as Les Lapins Crétins – literally ' The Idiot Rabbits'.

myself in a corner and program away on my own terms?
MA: Yes, of course!
RG: But you do relish the opportunity that it's given you?
MA: Exactly. It's a mix between very personal things, but at the same time you can't necessarily just have time to yourself. But it's interesting at the same time because everybody is giving ideas and will sometimes bring up things that you might not consider on your own. It is a very good thing.
RG: So what can you tell us about *Rayman Origins*?
MA: It's more to say, 'Look what we can do with 2D now.' At the same time, it's this idea of rediscovering the good old sensations of the old platform games from 20 years ago. You were limited in terms of possibilities, but at the same time you had a lot of ideas and could also try new things. This is allowing us to focus more on the gameplay and some other interesting elements.

RG: So what do you feel *Rayman Origins* offers over previous *Rayman* games?

MA: I think that it still offers the same good stuff, a large game, with good graphics and a lot of gameplay exploration, but on top of that there are the multiplayer aspects that can make the game more friendly and more social.

RG: Will there be more interesting gameplay dynamics added to the *Rayman* template?
MA: Of course. In fact, I think in this type of game you must surprise the player, and that's something that we really want to focus on. So we can say, 'Look, you've finished this location and we're offering the same gameplay, but now you have to react to it differently.' The thing I remember most about old games is that you were always going, 'What's next? What's next?' That's what we want to recreate.

It definitely reminds me of a classic 16-bit platformer where the player is rewarded through exploration. It's good because it makes you go through these levels with the feeling that there is still a lot left to do. You can choose between simply going through the game, or staying a long time. It's two different ways of playing, but it's still in the same universe. I love the idea of being able to let a player play at the rhythm he wants to play at.
RG: So why is it now a retail release instead of being episodic?
MA: The change is because of the nature of the game, which is more power-up based. It's better when you have levels that tease you about a new power and then you can go back and use that power to explore new locations. This is very hard to do with episodic content, especially as you might not buy all the instalments.
RG: *Rayman 3D* recently came out and was very successful. Are you still surprised by his popularity?
MA: Yes, it remains a big surprise for me. But I really think the success of the original *Rayman* is that 2D doesn't lie. It is always about collisions, precision, and this is why you have all the elements that mean you have to react quickly. It's perfection in gameplay, and I really like this type of gameplay where the focus is pure.
RG: What other developers do you respect and admire?
MA: I respect a lot of the Nintendo developers. They are able to get things down so early that they are the best examples for other games developers to look at. They way they focus on the science; the different parts; the deep gameplay and the secrets. Even the games that were done 20 years ago – if you look back, everything is there.
RG: What's the most interesting thing about being in the industry?
MA: It's definitely the people that I've met. The artists, the programmers – it's always exciting. When it all started it was very different – we were trailblazers – but it's very cool because you can now meet a lot of people and they are all making games differently. There are lots of people with new ideas and it pushes you to continue on and make something new.
RG: And it must be gratifying to know that some of those people are now here because of you and the games you made.
MA: We are employing some very young people who were, like, ten years old when *Rayman* came out, and they are working on a new *Rayman* game. There is the experience you had when you were young, but now you are on the other side of the mirror; you'll see how it works, and it's not so incredible and magic. It's not like magic pixie dust, but it's hard, satisfying work.


ZONE
26
1 2 3 4 5



Highway Encounter

SPONSOR THE DALEKS TO RUN A MARATHON

» RETROREVIVAL

» SPECTRUM
» VORTEX
» 1985

Despite appearing in an era where game-aping was more common than bad haircuts, *Highway Encounter* is one of those rare things from the 8-bit era: a popular game with a brilliantly simple gameplay idea that wasn't explicitly imitated by developers over the years. As such, a return to Costa Panayi's classic path-clearing puzzle/shooter might surprise you, as you'll be reunited with some familiar gameplay that seems to have lost little of its inventiveness.

So what about that simple concept behind the game? Well, *Highway Encounter* sees you helping little droids called Vortons (which look a little like Daleks, or some trendy dustbins with woks for lids) safely transport an unstable explosive device through 30 zones of perilous highway, where at the end sits an enemy alien base. With a number of annoying obstructions and deadly alien invaders littering the road, the mission was certainly challenging, even more so owing to fact that the Vortons weren't really the most intelligent of bomb transporters. Like *Lemmings*, they simply move in a straight line regardless of what obstacles lie ahead, stopping only when they hit an object, usually a barrel or box, or exploding instantly if they should come in contact with any of the game's many capricious alien enemies.

To help even things up a tad, the game gives you control of one Vorton at any one time. This selected drone has the freedom to move around the playing field, fire fuzzy-looking laser bolts, and shunt inanimate objects around the road to clear a path for the device being pushed by the Vortons. With the death of your movable unit resulting in the activation of another (if you have any in reserve, of course), and the game over when all Vortons are destroyed, a nice element of strategy is therefore found from prioritising, making progression on the road and the safeguarding of your extra tries by clever object positioning.

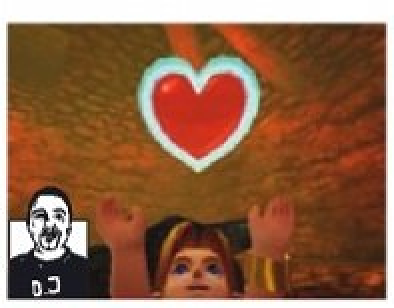
A wonderful little game that has lost none of its charm, beauty and playability over the years, *Highway Encounter* remains a must-play for fans of the shooter genre. *

RETRORATED

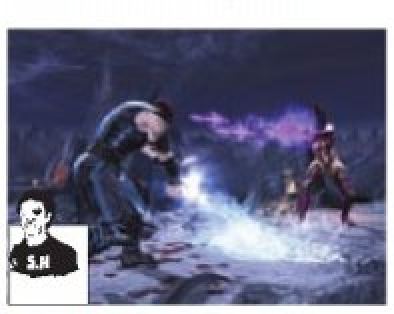


>> After months of waiting, Ocarina Of Time is finally here, and it's every bit as good as we were expecting it to be. Elsewhere this month, we look at Mortal Kombat's fun reboot, and revisit Square's Final Fantasy IV, courtesy of an excellent PSP update

PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time 3D
13 years on and it's still one of the greatest 3D adventures of all time. Absolutely timeless.



STUART
Mortal Kombat
I love *Ocarina*, but it's this fun reboot of *Mortal Kombat* that has been holding my attention.



DAVID
Sega Rally Online Arcade
I've always enjoyed *Sega Rally* and this latest offering from Sumo is great fun to play.

>> THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME 3D

The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time 3D

retro GAMER SIZZLER

NOW THIS IS HOW YOU REMAKE AN ALL-TIME CLASSIC

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** 3DS
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £39.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** GREZZO
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» Nintendo's *The Legend Of Zelda* series started life on the NES, before moving on in some form to every major Nintendo console and handheld since. Currently celebrating its 25th year, the franchise's next game will be *Skyward Sword* for the Wii, which will be out at the end of the year.

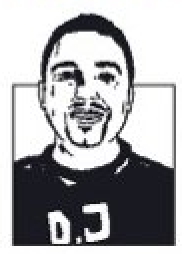
WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST (SNES)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS (DS)





When Nintendo announced that its venerable *Ocarina Of Time* would be one of the early showcase games for its 3DS, you could hear the groans coming from a mile off. While no one was doubting the brilliance of the original N64 game, many wanted to see new games, and not recycled classics from yesteryear like this and *Star Fox 64*, no matter how good they are. While we can certainly see the argument for brand new games, if future adaptations of old titles are as lovingly polished as *Ocarina Of Time 3D*, we'll be welcoming them all with open arms.

While there are a few annoying little niggles, which we'll address later, for the most part this new 3D iteration of the beloved classic improves on the original in every way. No mean feat for a title that many consider to be without equal.

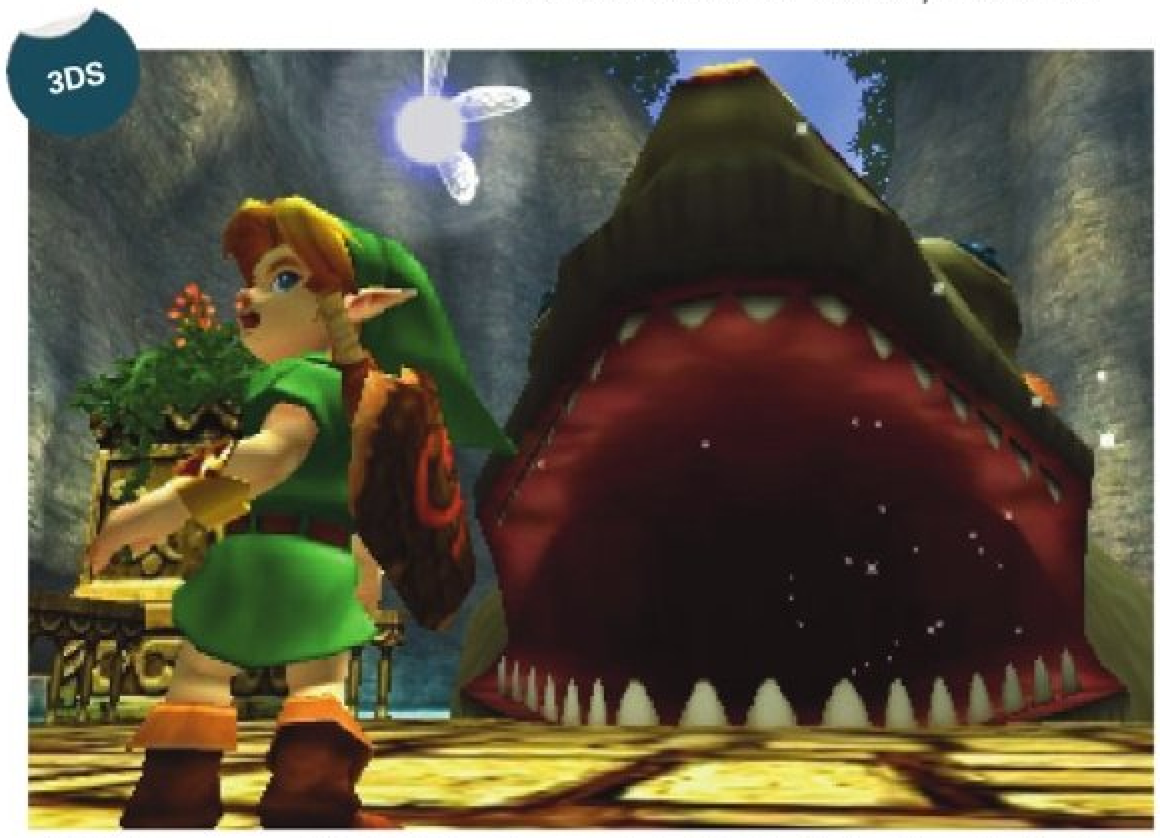
There can't be many who don't know *Ocarina Of Time*'s enchanting story, but in a nutshell it involves Link, a young adventurer, being summoned by Princess Zelda to thwart the plans of the evil Ganondorf. It's a magnificent adventure spanning both the huge world of Hyrule – which has never looked more vibrant – and time itself, and is filled with memorable characters, gripping twists and a truly malevolent antagonist. If you've never played it before you've missed out on one of the true gaming greats, but in some ways you're actually lucky because you're now able to play the definitive version of Nintendo's classic for the very first time.



» [3DS] The new character models have just as much personality as before.

The first thing that hits you about *Ocarina Of Time 3D* is just how stunning it now looks. The game has been given a huge graphical overhaul that breathes fresh life into the 13-year-old game. Textures have been completely redone, characters built from the ground up, and all the original pre-rendered sections have been redrawn and look absolutely stunning. Even walking out onto Hyrule Field will impress you, no matter how many times you've done it in the past, and this is mainly due to the masterful 3D effects.

The depth of field in *Ocarina Of Time* is quite simply astonishing, and it bodes extremely well for the upcoming release of *Star Fox 64 3D*. Running on an advanced version of the *Super Mario 64* engine, *Ocarina* was used back in the day to showcase the power of polygons, with dramatic sweeping cameras that translate perfectly to the new medium of 3D. Indeed, it's easy to forget that these dramatic



» [3DS] The cut-scenes of *Ocarina Of Time* always worked well, but the 3D gives them added depth.



» [3DS] Combat is still fast and fluid, but the lock-on can sometimes induce cramp.



✱GO DEEPER

The facts behind The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time 3D

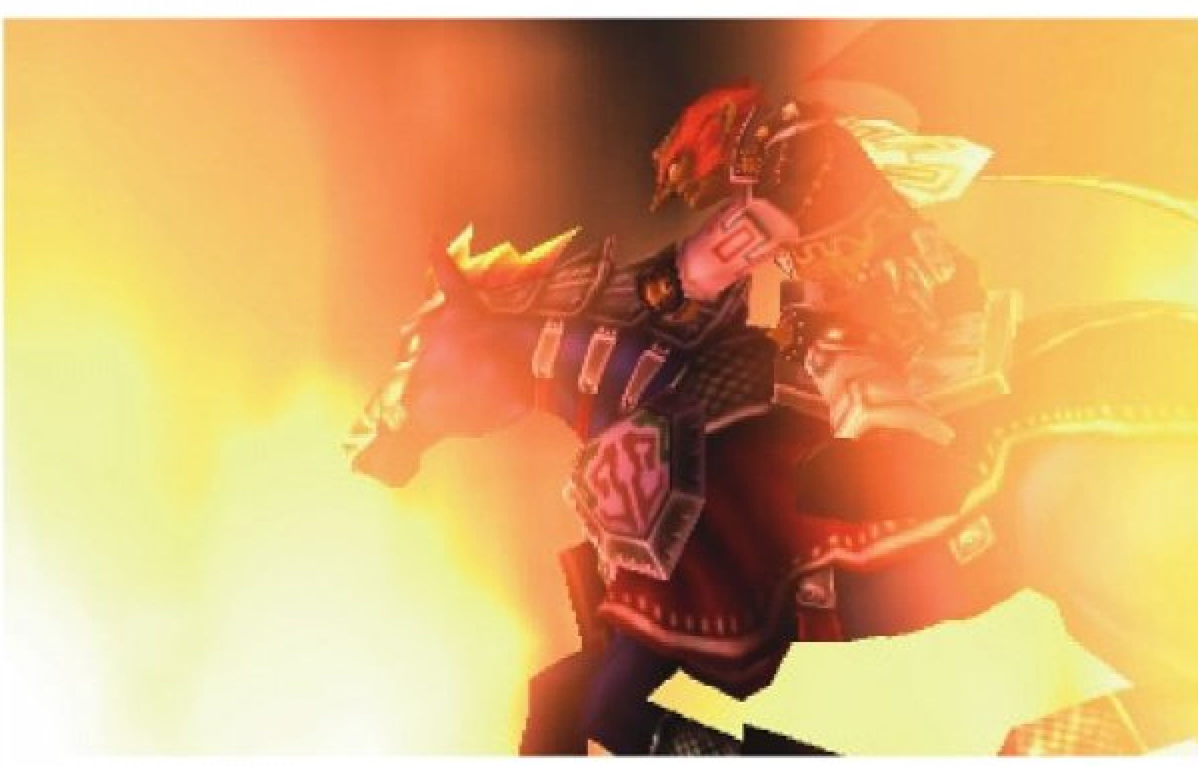
>> ***Ocarina Of Time 3D*'s developer, Grezzo, was founded in 2006. Its CEO and president is *Secret Of Mana* director Koichi Ishii**

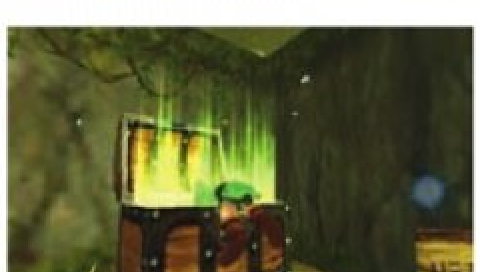
>> ***Ocarina Of Time* isn't the only N64 game to get a 3D makeover. *Star Fox 64* should be with us by the year's end**

>> **Master Quest features rearranged dungeons, which will bring joy to those who hated the Water Temple**



» [3DS] Fishing is still a pleasant time waster when you can't be bothered with the main quest.





Helping stones

IF THERE'S ONE thing we've learned about Nintendo, it's that it likes to make games that all the family can enjoy and easily complete. While Navi was already a helpful addition to *Ocarina Of Time*, Nintendo has come up with a brand new mechanic for holding your hand through Link's adventure. The new Sheikah Stones are situated in various locations and can be entered by Link at any time. They give you glimpses into the future, effectively showing you how to complete or access a particularly difficult puzzle or location. It's a nice touch, which should ensure that even the most green of gamers will get to complete this masterpiece.

camera angles were in the original game, because they seem so finely tuned for the 3DS's screen. Cut-scenes also benefit, but it's the game world itself that is the true standout. Link himself is perfectly layered and designed, and it really feels like you can reach out and touch him. It's like having your own little Link running around in his own virtual world and proves just how effective 3D can be when used correctly.

It's not just the visuals that have been greatly overhauled, though, as the controls have also been giving a serious makeover, and in some ways actually improve on the N64 originals. The map, Navi, items and your ability to view the world and equipment are now all mapped to the touch screen, allowing for quick and easy selection. It's particularly useful in sections like the Water Temple, which require constant changes between items. The ocarina is selected in the same way, with a quick stab of the screen switching between playing music or checking learned tunes.

If it wasn't enough that you're getting a brand new version of one of the greatest games of all time, Nintendo has also added a number of extras and new features. The first is the inclusion of the new Sheikah Stones (see boxout), found at certain points throughout the game, while the others are the inclusion of both Master Quest and a brand new Boss Rush mode.

Although both modes are greatly welcome and add to an already huge game, the inability to play them straight off the bat is a little irksome. Far more nigglesome, though, is the new view mode, where you look around Hyrule by physically moving your 3DS. It's a nice idea in theory but totally kills the brilliant 3D whenever you use it. It's rather fortuitous, then, that you can rely on the analogue stick for the vast majority of time when you need to use this viewpoint. Our final bugbear is that no matter how good the new control setup is, it can't compete with the original N64 controller. Like *Super Mario 64*, Link's adventure was built around that pad, and constant use of the lock-on can induce 3DS claw. We're being churlish, though, as even with these minor annoyances there's no denying that *Ocarina Of Time 3D* is the 3DS's best current game and one of the greatest adventures of all time.

In a nutshell

It may well be 13 years old, but you certainly wouldn't think it. Masterfully adapted and featuring some truly exceptional 3D, it's the 3DS's best game and a magnificent benchmark for adapting past classics.

>> Score **98%**



OPINION

I haven't played *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time* since it was first released, so this was a real nostalgia trip for me. It's a pleasure to return to Hyrule, and it's amazing how many little details you remember once you get back into it. The new visuals and extra features are great, of course, but it's the long walk down memory lane that did it for me.

Ashley Day



Dead Or Alive Dimensions

STREET FIGHTER, BUT WITH FAR MORE JIGGLE

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** 3DS » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £39.99 » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO » **DEVELOPER:** TEAM NINJA » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

3DS



» [3DS] It wouldn't be a *Dead Or Alive* game if you didn't have access to lots of unlockable costumes.



Well it's little wonder that Nintendo decided to keep this little beauty back from the 3DS launch line-up. It's superb. We might have been impressed with Capcom's handheld version of *Super Street Fighter IV*, but Tecmo effortlessly KOs it.

Everything about *Dead Or Alive Dimensions* is perfect for portable play, and we're not just talking about its button setup either. Structurally it's superb, with an interesting, if rather barmy, story mode that ties up the plots from the first three games, and cleverly retcons in the characters from *Dead Or Alive 4*. It also continually teaches you new moves and skills throughout the convoluted story, ensuring that your ability slowly improves as the bewildering plot reaches its culmination.

Visually it's gorgeous, with super slick animation – turn off the 3D slider for a silky-smooth 60fps – on top of beautifully rendered backgrounds and excellent environment damage, while the 3D effect is very convincing.



What we love most about it, though, is the sheer amount of genuinely decent content it features. In addition to the lengthy story mode you have online and offline versus; the traditional arcade mode; Survival and Tag Challenge, which let you team up with a computer opponent for two-on-two shenanigans; and Throwdown lets you just challenge other players that you pass on the street; while Free Play and training are both huge time sinks. Add in a Showcase that apes that figure-collecting from Capcom's brawler and plenty of unlockable costumes and characters, as you'd expect from *DOA*, and *Dimensions* becomes a loving tribute to the series and the 3DS's definitive fighter.

OPINION

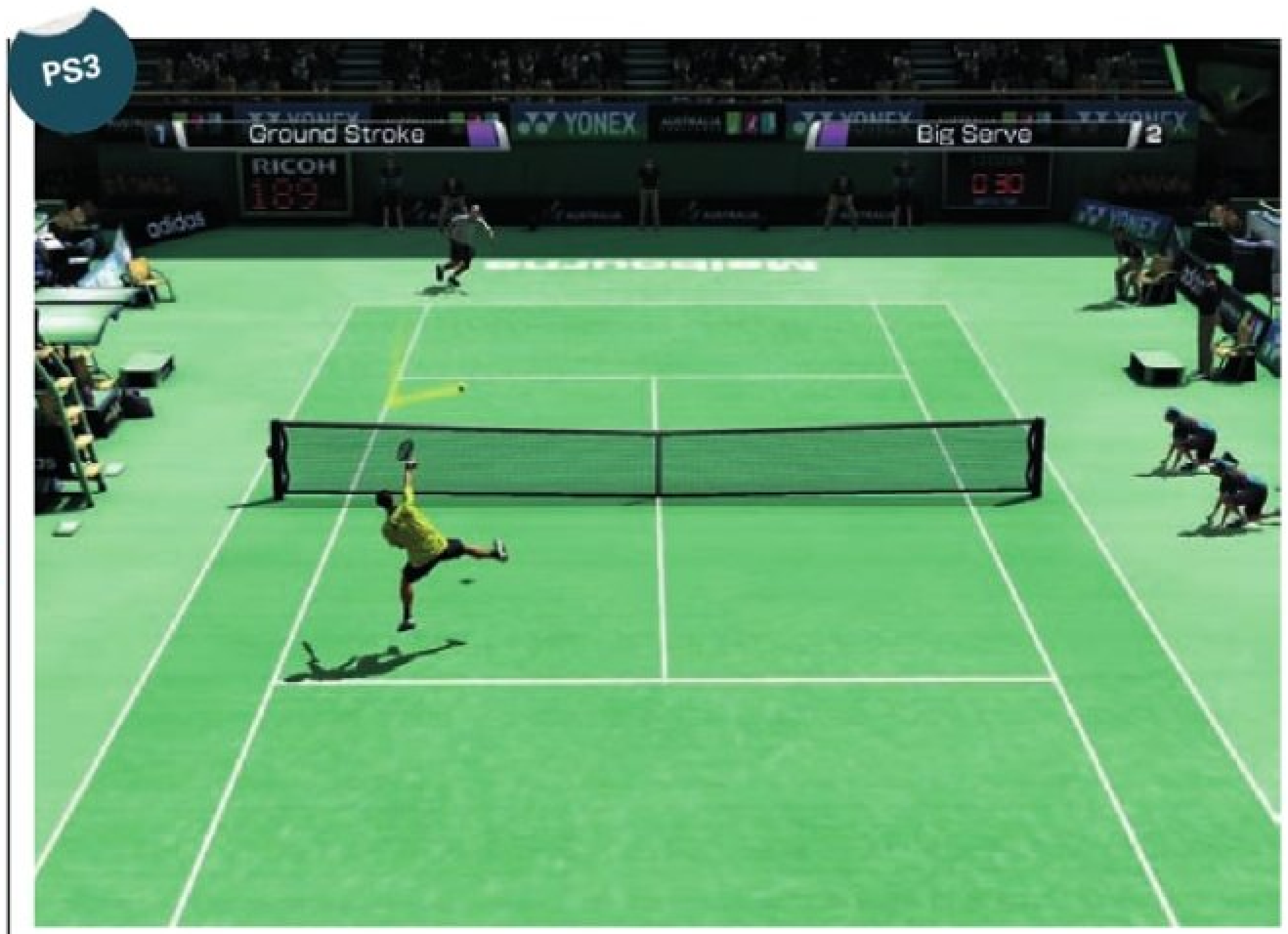


An excellent fighter from Team Ninja that features plenty of fan service, gorgeous visuals and some extremely tight gameplay. The 3D is also of a decent standard, while the multitude of game modes offer plenty of longevity. A brilliant alternative to Capcom's fighter.

Stuart Hunt

>> Score **91%**

PS3



» [PS3] The animation is still fantastic, with all the officially licensed players looking extremely lifelike.

Virtua Tennis 4

SAME OLD, BUT NOT NECESSARILY A BAD THING

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3 » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** XBOX 360, Wii » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £49.99 » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA » **DEVELOPER:** SEGA AM3 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4



The *Virtua Tennis* series finds itself stuck between a rock and a hard place. While it effortlessly plays one of the best games of tennis since the SNES's *Super Tennis*, an unwillingness to tinker with the winning formula means a new game often feels far too familiar.

This latest offering is no different, with its main gimmick, motion controls, being best ignored in favour of simply sitting down with a good old-fashioned and far less tiring joypad. While the PS3's Move controls do a far better job than the Xbox 360 version's Kinect controls manage, it still lacks the precision that tight rallies are built upon, and the switching between first and third-person is extremely tough to get your head around. Then there's the fact that many of the modes don't actually use it, making it all seem like something that's been implemented at the very last moment.



Far more successful are the new introductions that had been made to the tried and tested *Virtua Tennis* gameplay and World Tour modes, which have been entertaining gamers for the last 12 years. The new Skill Shot slowly builds up over time and allows you to deliver a shot that is amazingly hard to return, while the eight new mini-games, which range from playing rallies against constantly changing winds to protecting chicks *Flicky*-style, show that Sega has lost none of its trademark wackiness. Even the World Tour now takes an interesting board game approach, which is easy to follow and refreshing to play.

It's impossible to deny that *Virtua Tennis 4* feels quite rushed in places, but it still plays a cracking game of tennis and boasts enough content to hold your interest, and ultimately that's what really matters.

OPINION



Yes, the core gameplay is virtually unchanged since the arcade original, and yes, you still can't purposely hit out shots like you can in *Super Tennis*, but Sega AM3 still knows how to create a stunning tennis game. And the new chick mini-game is amazing.

Darran Jones

>> Score **82%**

Final Fantasy IV: The Complete Collection

ONE OF JAPAN'S BEST RPGS GETS BETTER

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PSP » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £39.99 » **PUBLISHER:** SQUARE ENIX » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1



After being impressed with last month's *Final Fantasy III* iPhone port, we've found ourselves thrust into another epic adventure on Sony's PSP. Square Enix is now promising the ultimate version of *Final Fantasy IV,* with this UMD featuring the original game, its enjoyable follow-up *Final Fantasy IV: The After Years* and the brand new *Final Fantasy IV: Interlude,* which ties both adventures together.

It's an impressive package that features beautiful sprites, the option of listening to the original SNES tunes or new orchestrated affairs, and an expanded bestiary that will take an age to fully complete.

You could argue that the game features huge difficulty spikes in places – intense grinding is your friend here, as in many RPGs of this era – and there are far too many random encounters, but there's no denying that it features a gripping story and interesting characters that you truly start to care for.

The core gameplay shines through the old structure, and even if you've completed Square's game many times before, it soon sinks its claws into you once more. Add in *The After Years*, which takes place many years after the events of the original game, and the brief but very important *Interlude*, and *The Complete Collection* offers excellent value for money, even if you've played a previous iteration.

This is by far the best version of Square's RPG to ever get released, and it's something of a shame that other classic titles don't always get the same care and attention as this magnificent update. A superb collection that every RPG fan needs to own.

>> Score **90%**



» [PSP] The graphical overhaul of *Final Fantasy IV* looks brilliant.



OPINION



While there's no denying that the story and characters remain enjoyable, I'm getting a little wary of these continual updates. Square Enix has created an extremely impressive package, but I still can't help but feel a rather large sense of déjà vu.

Darran Jones



Puzzle Bobble Universe

» **SYSTEM:** DS
» **PRICE:** £34.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **After the packed** *Puzzle Bobble Galaxy*, *Universe* comes across as half-finished. There's no two-player, only two gameplay modes, and all the fun mini-games introduced in *Galaxy* are nowhere to be seen. There's no denying that it's as addictive as ever, but there's simply not enough content to justify the high price point.

>> Score **50%**



Trouble Witches Neo!

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> **Fans of *Deathsmiles*** will do well to invest in *Trouble Witches Neo!*. While the mechanics aren't quite as elegant, it's a highly enjoyable shooter with clever bullet patterns and some painfully cute visuals. There's plenty of replayability, and the challenging bosses and catchy music will keep dragging you back for one more go. Harmless, silly fun.

>> Score **79%**



Sega Rally Online Arcade

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-6

>> **There's no denying** that *Sega Rally Online Arcade* is an enjoyable, if sparse, racer. It looks great, features solid handling and has five enjoyable tracks to tear around. Unfortunately, like *Revo* and *Sega Rally 3*, it's not as good as the original. It's a fun racer and the time attacks become worryingly addictive, but it's still rather light on actual content.

>> Score **70%**

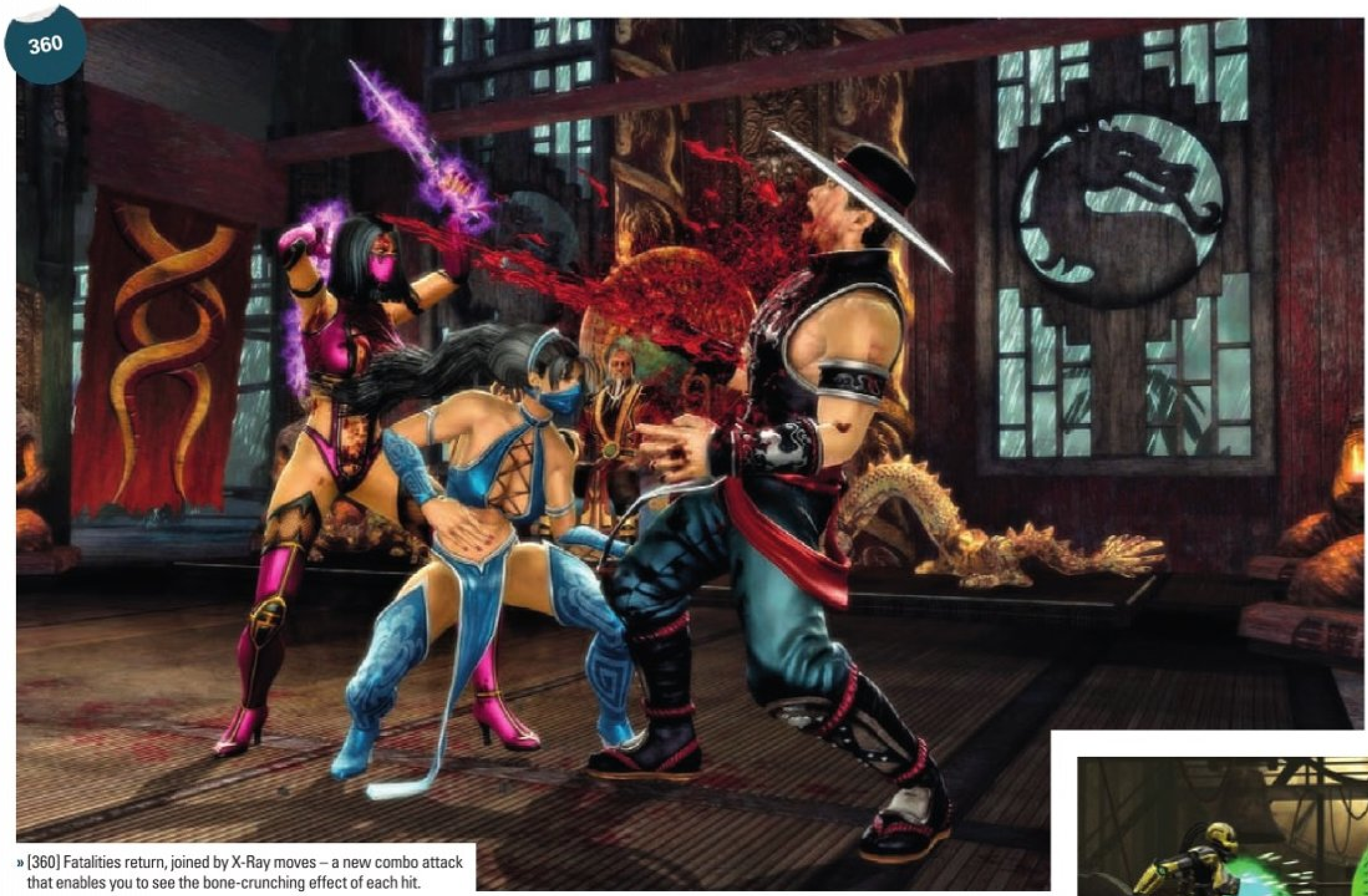


Chaos Rings Omega

» **SYSTEM:** iOS
» **PRICE:** £8.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **Fans of Square Enix's** gob-smacking iPad game will be pleased to know that its sequel looks every bit as good. Sadly, the same attention hasn't been given to the gameplay, and while the execution and mechanics remain serviceable, they've changed very little. There's an inescapable feeling of familiarity to *Chaos Rings Omega*.

>> Score **71%**



» [360] Fatalities return, joined by X-Ray moves – a new combo attack that enables you to see the bone-crunching effect of each hit.



A SATISFYING BOWEL OF SPECIAL K AND NINETIES LEFTOVERS

Mortal Kombat



Given that it is possibly the most polarising franchise in videogame history, it's understandable that feelings towards *Mortal Kombat* tend to fall into two camps: those who harbour a fondness for the game, and those who would rather play Spin The Bottle in a retirement home.

Of the many failed attempts to bring the franchise into the realm of 3D fighting over the years, and the many forgettable spin-offs to have emerged, this latest entry is by far the best sequel since the last pretty good one… *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3*, if memory serves.

If you're any sort of fan, be it large, small or fair-weather, you won't be disappointed by this current-gen rebirth, as Ed Boon and NetherRealm Studios have certainly sought to reward your dedication. Indeed, save for the game coming packed with a helpful Dan Forden to follow you around your home and shout 'Toasty' every time your toaster pings, in terms of fan service it couldn't be better, and this (unsurprisingly) proves to be both its Samson hairdo and its Achilles heel.

What is most pleasing is the sheer number of game modes and options on offer – far too many to list in full here. Beyond the obvious Arcade mode, there's a decent and surprisingly meaty Story mode that enables you to replay the story of the first three games in the series, flitting control between all the main characters as the story unfurls. Meanwhile, Challenge Tower tasks you with working your way up through a huge table of one-off challenges – such as defeating an opponent by hitting specific areas of their body or performing requested moves to win a round – to (oddly) unlock sections of other modes found in the game and familiarise you with the game mechanics and characters.

As we've said, however, *Mortal Kombat*'s strong ties with nostalgia do work both with and against it. Whether intended or not, aspects of the irritating and rigid-feeling fighting mechanics and AI logic of past *Mortal Kombat* games make an unwelcome return. This results in opponents sometimes repeating their moves in quick succession, and it being difficult to read and considerately react to close-quarter attacks, as well as those maddening animation-clipping moves that see your opponent throw you fighter before you've had a chance to register what's just happened. Offensively, at least, things have certainly been improved thanks to a more detailed combo and combat system, which, while not perfect, feels far more solid, expressive and satisfying than that in any previous iteration of the game so far.

Mortal Kombat might not be the flawless reinvention many will have been hoping for, but it is a solid, entertaining sequel marking the long-awaited return of what the series does best.

INFORMATION

- **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS3
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £44.99
- **PUBLISHER:** WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT
- **DEVELOPER:** NETHERREALM STUDIOS
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» Released into arcades in 1992, *Mortal Kombat* was the first true legitimate contender to the *Street Fighter II* crown, spawning a number of sequels and genre spin-off games, and even tried several times to make the jump to 3D, unsuccessfully. However, with Ed Boon back at the helm, things seem to be back on track, for the time being at least.

OPINION



As much as I love the fan service of *Mortal Kombat*, it's really let down by the fighting. Yes it's silly, yes it's bloody, but it's also highly reminiscent of the clunkier *Mortal Kombat*s of old, and after hammering the likes of *BlazBlue* and *Super Street Fighter IV* it just feels tired.

Darran Jones

In a Nutshell

A strong and solid *Mortal Kombat* game – one with lovely visuals, an abundance of options, variety, characters and lashings of gore. As such, there is little here trying to change attitudes towards the long-running series.

>> **Score 76%**

GO DEEPER

The facts behind Mortal Kombat

>> NetherRealm Studio, headed by *MK* co-creator Ed Boon, was formerly Midway Games before being bought by Warner Bros.

>> Though it is being mooted as a reboot of sorts, this game is the ninth official instalment in the *Mortal Kombat* series.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

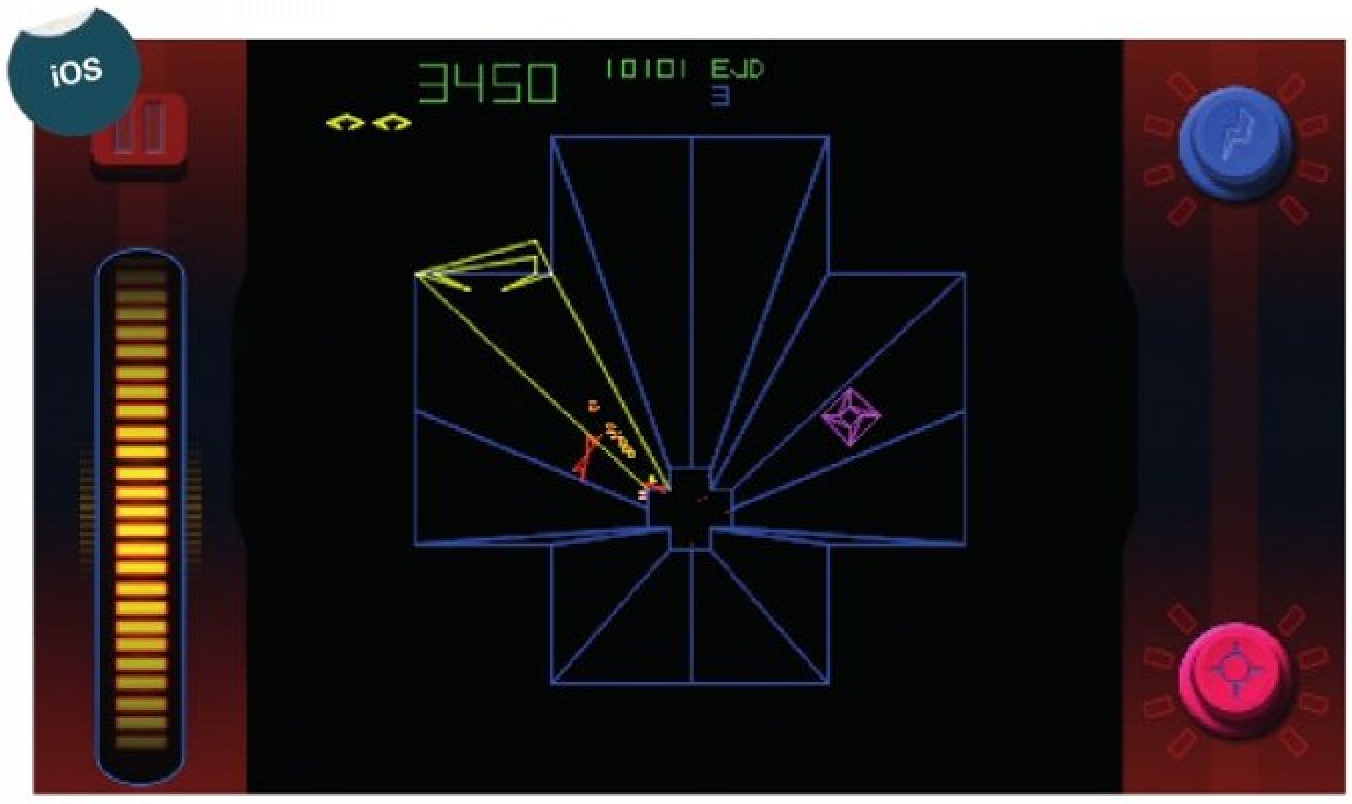
MORTAL KOMBAT 2 (MULTI)

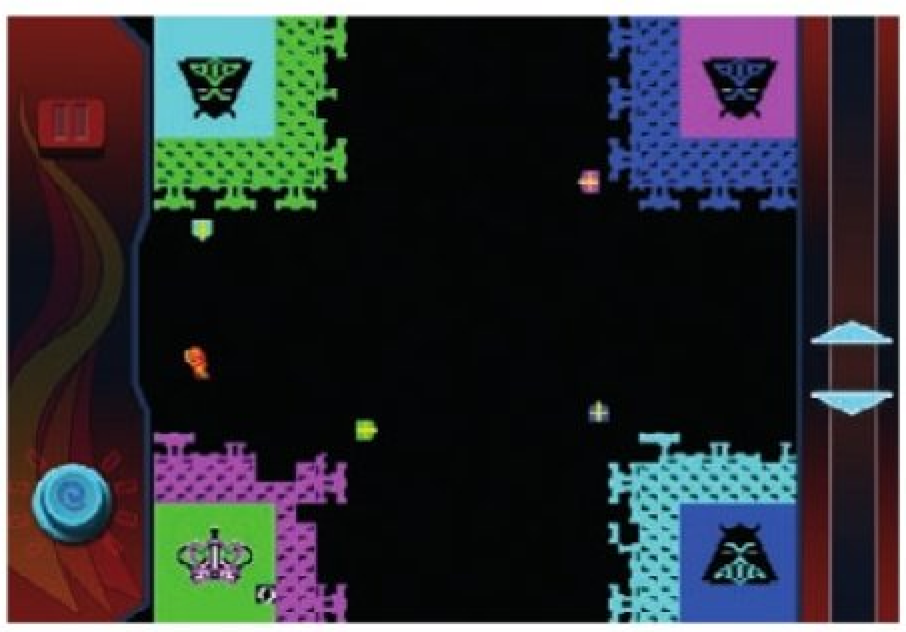


▽ SOMETHING NEW

SUPER STREET FIGHTER IV (MULTI)







» [iOS] We didn't mind *Warlords* too much, but it's still no match for a trackball.

Atari's Greatest Hits

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** iOS » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** FREE (IN-APP PURCHASES) » **PUBLISHER:** CODE MYSTICS » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1-4



We really want to love Atari's first iOS compilation. After all, it has an impressive array of games to choose from, sensible pricing and sparkling presentation. The app itself is free to download and comes with a solitary game, the arcade classic *Missile Command*. You then have the option of buying additional packs of games at 59 pence a pop, or you can purchase the whole lot (that's 18 arcade games and a massive 92 Atari 2600 games) for a not too shabby £8.99.

The presentation is also of an extremely high standard, with surprisingly accurate emulation, a variety of options and a gallery that features flyers and additional photography. Menus are easy to navigate and the whole package feels extremely slick.

What a pity, then, that many of the games fall down in the playability stakes. The main issue here is that many of the control systems used just aren't good enough to do these games justice. Despite the fact that there are plenty of different methods used to replicate the dials, sticks and spinners of the original games, many of the titles struggle when you try to control them.

The iPhone comes off worse, thanks to its smaller screen making many of the control layouts far too cluttered for their own good. Things certainly pick up on the iPad, but even then some of the faster games like *Tempest* just aren't as responsive as we'd like.

Atari's Greatest Hits is certainly of interesting release, but, as with Elite's Spectrum emulator, the host hardware doesn't always do the games the justice they deserve. An interesting compilation that's let down by frustrating control issues.

OPINION



While I've been enjoying the games, I've lost count of the number of times I've lost a life due to my fingers slipping off the virtual controls. The presentation is faultless, but after being impressed by Atari's DS compilation, this just isn't up to the same high standards.

Stuart Hunt

>> Score **56%**

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews



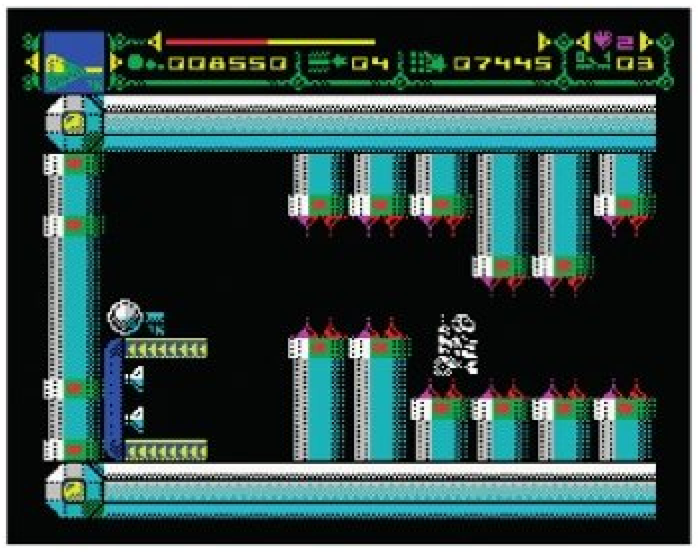
One thing that struck me recently while following the Portal 2 alternate reality game was that homebrew titles aren't particularly well promoted. Many developers don't even think to email their friendly neighbourhood retro magazine, let alone put time into generating a little hype; the trailer that Locomalito released for Viriax or perhaps even a small ARG is possible on a shoestring budget, but makes a new game stand out

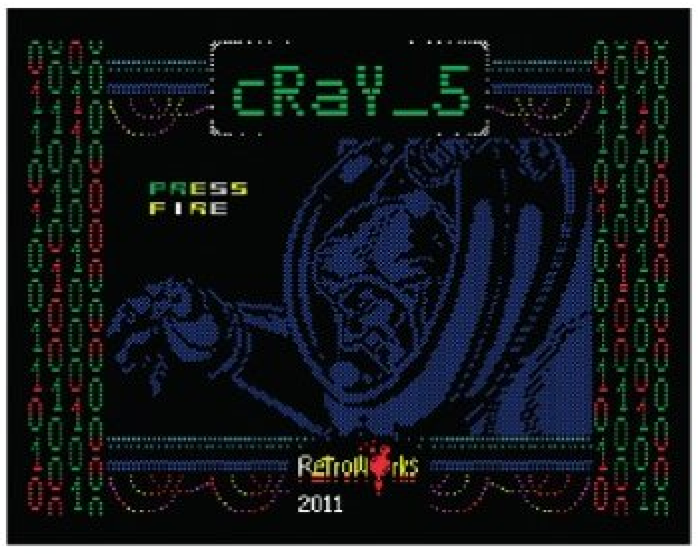
CRAY-5

BOLDLY GOING WHERE NO SUPERCOMPUTER HAS GONE BEFORE



» [Spectrum] Glad to see the back of that room!







» **FORMAT:** 128K SPECTRUM
» **DEVELOPED BY:** RETRO WORKS
» **LINK:** KIKSTART.EU/CRAY-5
» **RELEASE DATE:** 2011
» **PRICE:** FREE

The human race, having finally used the very last reserves of fossil fuel on Earth and decimated what remained of the environment in the process, has now set off into space in order to find new worlds to colonise. But, since mankind has finally demonstrated to itself that it really shouldn't be left in charge of anything important, the 5,000 people heading towards the stars have been given a guardian angel to watch over them in the form of a supercomputer; the semi-sentient Cray-5 is the perfect machine for this particular babysitting job, and one of the main designers behind it, who is presumably a distant relative of Seymour Cray, has agreed to join the mission as well.

With such an amazing computer and the genius creator on standby should the need arise, what could possibly go wrong? After all, the chances of a single asteroid smashing into a nuclear reactor, in turn causing a radiation leak that corrupts the Cray-5 to the point where it activates the ship's self-destruct mechanism… well, the chances of something like that are truly astronomical. Still, it'd be a seriously dull game if the journey was uneventful.

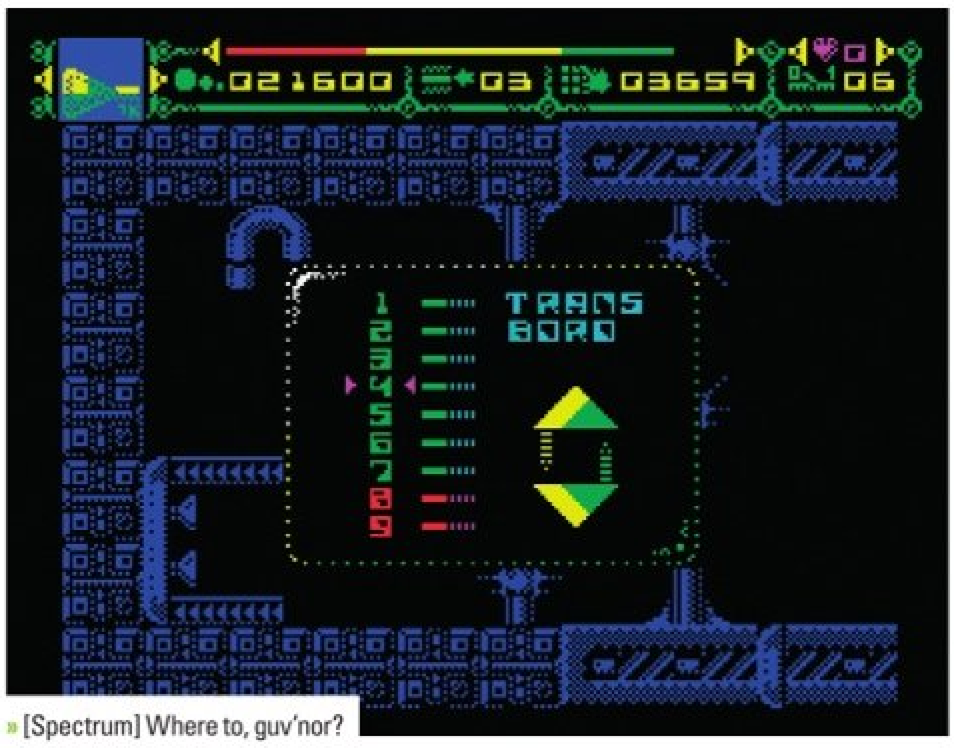
Cray-5 the game starts with the titular computer at full alert, the ship's self-destruct timer ticking ominously down and Seymour's relative, now kitted out with a handy jet pack and weapon, charged with taking on the various anti-tamper mechanisms of the supercomputer that he helped to design. The robot-shaped switches that need to be pulled and colour-coded keys that allow access through security doors are distributed around the nine areas of the ship, which are in turn linked by a teleporter system, so Cray's journey to the Cray-5's master off switch is going to be rather arduous, especially since he can only carry one key at a time and the corridors are partially constructed from deadly tiles and spikes. On the plus side, the defence drones aren't particularly well-armoured or indeed bright, and a couple of well-aimed shots will usually take care of them. Constructing a map is probably a wise move, otherwise the backtracking required to ferry keys around can easily result in players becoming lost within the expansive colony ship.

The original *Cray-5* was released for the Amstrad CPC in 1987 by Spanish firm Topo Soft and has aged fairly badly. This 2011 Spectrum remix, while taking its cues from that Amstrad original, has been reworked and stands as the more playable game for those changes; along with more detailed visuals and small touches such as the exhaust gases from the jet pack when it's working, the controls have been modified quite a bit so, while our hero's newly added inertia does get in the way initially for the more fiddly parts of the map where precise movement is required and the collisions are strict, it's still a significant improvement overall and doesn't take long to acclimatise to.

88%



» [Spectrum] At least there's no lift in here too.



» [Spectrum] Where to, guv'nor?

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

MASHED TURTLES

» **FORMAT:** ATARI 8-BIT » **DEVELOPER:** FANDAL AND PG » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/MASHED-TURTLES » **PRICE:** FREE



» [Atari 8-bit] This won't end well…

***Frogger* has always** been such a solitary experience, but with *Mashed Turtles* an entire nest of turtles can take on a motorway together, even competing to see which can get the most completed crossings.

Getting across the highway unscathed is difficult since the drivers have their collective foot down and change speed without warning, but there aren't any lives counters to worry about and splattered turtles simply respawn at the beginning.

The matches either take place against the clock, which can be set for one to five minutes, or are based on completing a quota of crossings. Up to eight players can compete simultaneously if a multijoy interface is connected and a minimum of two players are required to play. A one-player mode would have been nice, but this is a good choice for a gaming night in.

82%

HORA BRUJA

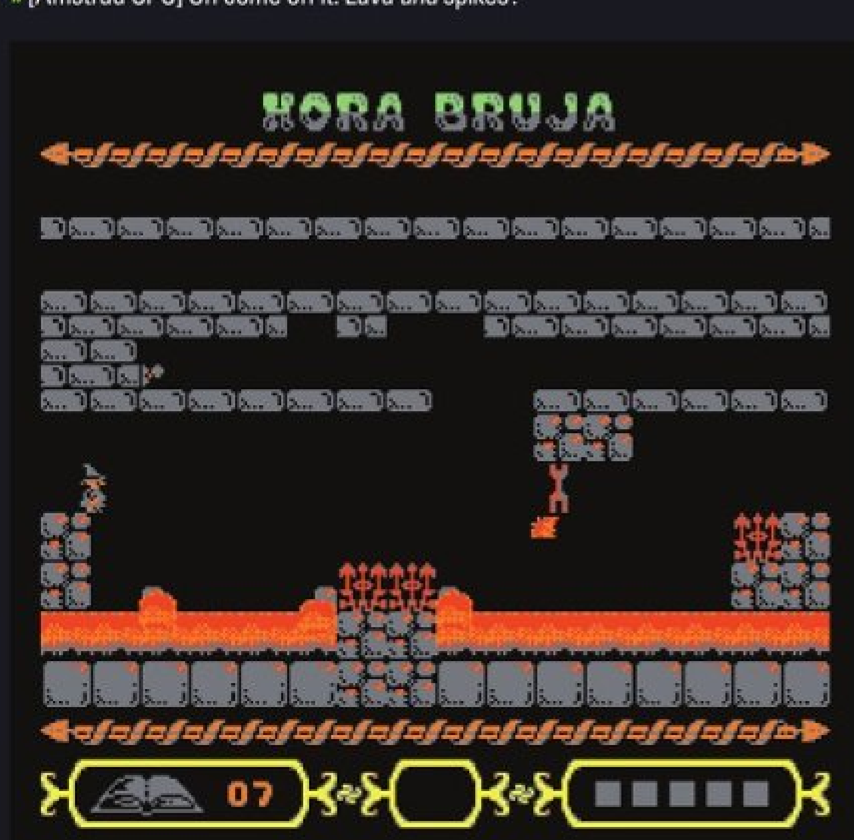
» **FORMAT:** AMSTRAD CPC » **DEVELOPER:** ESP SOFT
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/HORA-BRUJA » **PRICE:** FREE

Witch Hara ruled the kingdom of Galbar with an iron fist until she was overthrown, her spell book broken apart and the sorceress herself locked up. Peace and harmony have been the keywords for over 130 years until the coalition ruling the land expires and the power vacuum is filled by another evil mage. Hara, now aided by the player, must collect her spells to prevent her successor's power becoming absolute.

Hora Bruja – which translates to 'Witch Time' – is a slightly difficult platform game in the same way that pigs find flying slightly difficult; the margin of error for most jumps, either over deadly spikes or enemies, is minuscule, and Hara's only protection from losing her single life is an equally diminutive energy gauge. This is a gruelling quest to be undertaken by those who are hardcore platform gaming fanatics, masochists or preferably both.

67%

» [Amstrad CPC] Oh come off it. Lava *and* spikes?





» [Amstrad CPC] A big, threatening lever.



CLONE

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE PLUS/4 » **DEVELOPER:** GÁBOR VARGA
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/CLONE » **PRICE:** FREE

***Clone* is a** puzzle game released on the C64 by CP Verlag back in 1992, but this conversion has been programmed from scratch. The 64 cells on the left of the play area have to be manipulated until they match those on the right. Aiming the pointer at a cell and clicking will change its colour as well as the four surrounding it in a cross pattern, the swatch in the centre of the play area indicating what each cell will change to.

There are some strictly rationed helpers in the status bar that alter how the colours cycle, and the playfield can be reset up to seven times, either at the player's request or if the timer expires; any reached stage can then be selected as a starting point from the titles page. *Clone* is simpler to play than it might sound, at least until it starts getting devious, so Plus/4 owners who fancy a mental challenge know where to look.

86%

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Atari 8-bit] Come back, you coward!

>> To the death

An Atari 8-bit conversion of Mervyn Escourt's Spectrum 3D blaster *Deathchase* is under way courtesy of the prolific XXL. At the moment the game is ported from the original code and running in two shades of one colour, but the developer wants to put in new graphics and sound that will more fully take advantage of the Atari's hardware. Follow this link to get to the YouTube video: **kikstart.eu/deathchase-a8-vid**



» [Amstrad CPC] How do you put batteries in the decoder?

>> The Final Frontier

Along with *Hora Bruja*, reviewed elsewhere on this page, ESP Soft has also released a text adventure recently. Called *Arquimedes XXI*, it was originally developed and published by Dinamic for the Spectrum and MSX back in 1986. Along with converting the program, ESP Soft has taken the time to translate the text, making it available in French, English and the original Spanish. **kikstart.eu/arqui-xxi** has more information.



» [C64] Say 'cheese', Jim!

>> Give us a grin

It's been a remarkably long time in coming – over two decades, in fact – but German publisher Protovision has announced the release of *The Adventures Of Jim Slim In Dragonland*, a brightly coloured scrolling platformer that pushes the C64 technically. **kikstart.eu/jim-slim** goes to the website, but players wanting to use a real C64 should try the demo first since the scrolling doesn't work on every machine.

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'SBREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

>> Duncan dares – without Duncan

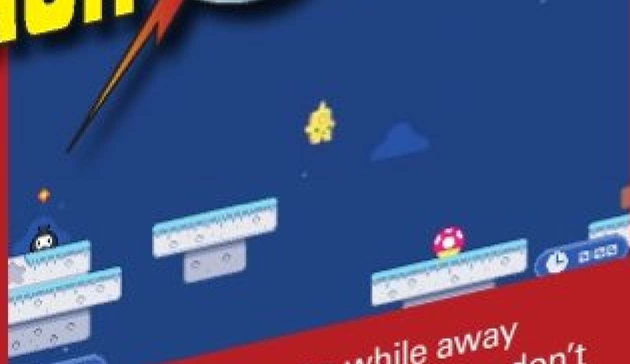
At the time of writing, the 20th instalment of the Ludum Dare game creation competition over at **www.ludumdare.com/compo/** is being voted on. During the course of the four days over which the competition ran, a truly staggering 352 entries were created, all based on the selected theme of 'It's dangerous to go alone! Take this!' and covering a wide range of genres from platforming to lawnmowing in the process. There's something for everyone in there, but you'll need to put aside a few hours to browse through.



>> Music, maestro, please

An album of 14 soundtrack remixes by various artists that have been based on the music composed by Gryzor87 for the excellent horizontal blaster *Hydorah*, which we covered back in issue 81, is now available for free download. The URL you'll be wanting is **hydorah.bandcamp.com**, and you should find a link on that page to the original *Hydorah* soundtrack album as well, giving 64 pieces of music in total.

FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at **Sky Island.**

LOOKS CAN QUITE literally be deceiving in *Sky Island*, and what appears to be a 2D platformer allows the view to be rotated with the mouse, revealing and hiding elements of the background; the changing of camera position can be used to solve puzzles and reach otherwise impossible places. **kikstart.eu/sky-island**

OTHER GAMES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING. . .



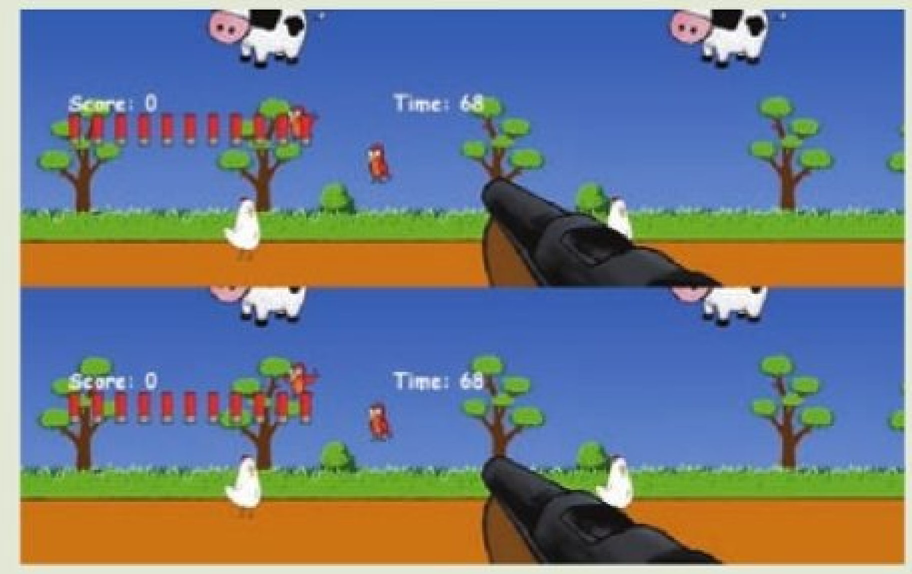
VIRIAX

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/VIRIAX

The human body has been turned into a battlefield by the highly adaptive and virulent Viriax infection. Humanity began to fight back, and the boffins came up with a solution called the Nanobot Assembly System, a microscopic production line that can be embedded near the base of the brain to churn out nanobots designed to prevent the infection reaching important areas. Things were starting to look promising until a new strain of infection appeared that could defeat the new defences.

Unusually, the player is given control of the infection; left and right move horizontally while pushing up causes it to swim towards its destination. Pushing down will boost downwards to attack drones and occasional bonus-yielding parts of the body. Swimming upwards takes strength, which can be replenished by collecting red blood cells or other collectable goodies, including a more powerful jump, a magnet to draw in life-giving cells, increased stamina and score bonuses.

Viriax isn't a shoot-'em-up since you never fire, but the process of dashing through enemies is surprisingly addictive in the same way that good blasters tend to be. The graphics and sound wouldn't have seemed out of place in an Eighties arcade and, because the levels are generated on the fly, no two games will be the same.

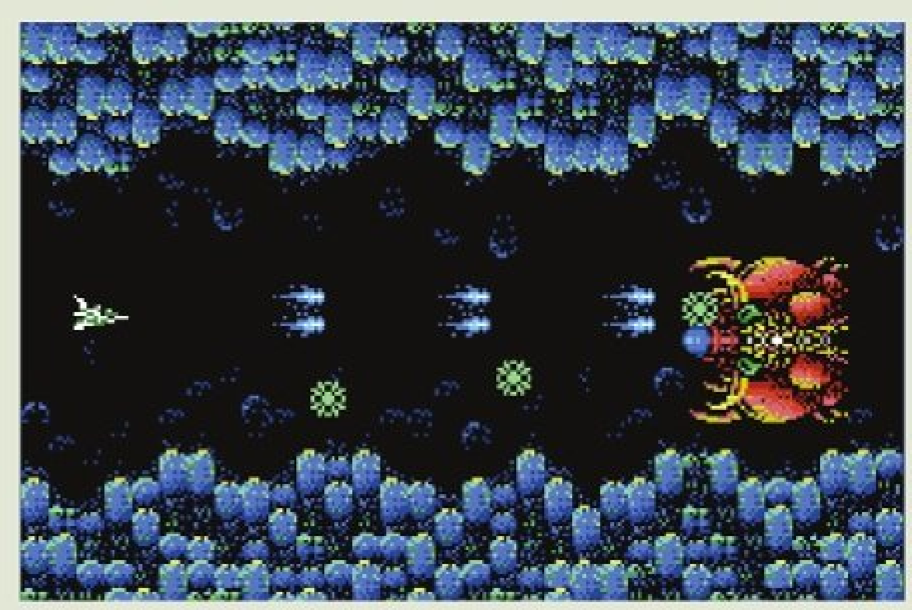


MODERN HUNT

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/MODERN-HUNT

***Modern Hunt* is** what the result of letting a studio like Infinity Ward loose on *Duck Hunt* would possibly look like. Gone is the dog and ducks flying in single file, the player instead handed a rifle and sniping at assorted animals, zooming in with the left trigger, firing with the right and aiming with the right thumbstick.

The humour behind the initial idea extends to the game; for example, cows with balloons tied to their waists float past and either explode into a shower of steaks when shot or plummet to the ground with a plaintive moo if their balloon is popped. This isn't anywhere near a remake of *Duck Hunt*, but it does offer a challenge along with the slightly childish giggles.



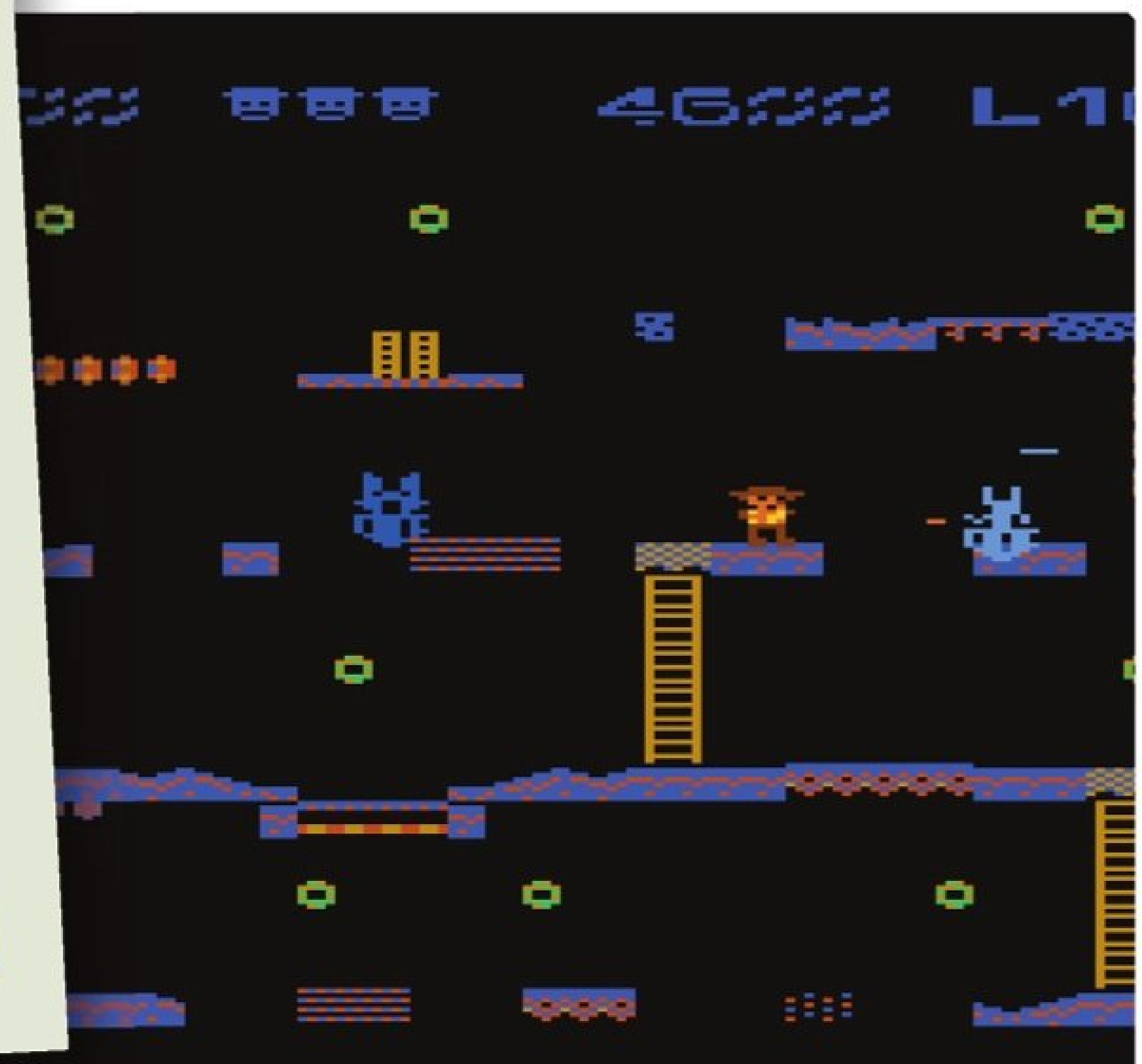
LIFE FORTRESS VOLCABAMBA

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/LIFE-FORTRESS

The back story of *Life Fortress Volcabamba* presumably sees the usual intergalactic war and a lone fighter launched to save the day. Surprisingly, there aren't any power-ups to collect, but the pilot can rotate the already decent cannon in 45-degree steps to blast those hard-to-reach enemies and find the bonuses secreted throughout each stage.

The author must be an MSX shoot-'em-up fan because he's simulated the machine right down to the bright palette and chunky scrolling, and more hardened lovers of the genre should give this one a go because, scrolling aside, it's tough but fair and attack patterns can be learnt – it'd be right at home on a real MSX, so perhaps someone will convert it.





[Atari 8-bit] Gwobby's most recent outing.

HOMEBREW HEROES

Jason Kendall, whose website is at gwobby.webs.com, has been developing Atari 8-bit games for several years now, most recently producing a series of platform-based action titles themed around his own character, Gwobby

Q&A

Retro Gamer: What got you into development?
Jason Kendall: My best mate had an Atari 800 and I used to play *Pac-Man*, *Donkey Kong* and *Missile Command*, and this led to me getting an Atari 130XE. The handbook had a few BASIC programs to type in, and I was hooked! I spent many hours typing in magazine listings. From there I created a few games of my own.

RG: How did the large cast around Gwobby come about?
JK: It was all my idea… okay, well, my godson Dylan has a good imagination and is very creative. He came up with the ideas for the characters, and the whole Gwobby world has grown from there and is still growing. His older brother Jake might claim to have invented Gwobby, but it will remain a mystery as no one can remember!

RG: Did those characters present themselves first or were they shaped by the game?
JK: I have written games for his older two brothers before they got too old and lost interest, and when they come to visit I sometimes knock up a 'quick' game for them – and then spend six months working on it afterwards, and then, on their next visit, they go, 'Okay, let's do a new game!' Gwobby was originally a 'Q' that moved around the screen. Check out *Gwobby Jr* to see the resulting prototype game, which evolved into *Gwobby's Adventure* – a pretty original game. To answer the question, game idea first, then the characters! They don't all feature in the games… yet!

RG: What have you found to be the most enjoyable and difficult parts of developing a game?
JK: The most enjoyable is getting some neat code to work, even simple stuff you see in other people's programs or articles from magazines. Especially if it runs quicker or saves a few bytes – 32K isn't much to play with!

The most difficult parts are getting everything completely as I would like it, often having extra ideas or tweaks and making the games playable for the ham and eggers – no names mentioned!

HIGH FIVE

The classic games that Jason can't live without

1. **His Dark Majesty (Atari 8-bit)** *Ultima* meets *Archon*, superb and completable. Voted best game of 2010 on AtariOnline.pl!
2. **Yoomp! (Atari 8-bit)** One of the best A8 games of all time.
3. **Diamondz (Atari 8-bit)** A puzzle game that is actually fun!
4. **Dracula Lives (Atari 8-bit)** Classic but tough arcade adventure.
5. **Actris (Atari 8-bit)** Finally an excellent A8 *Tetris*. You can't touch this!

RG: What are you currently working on?
JK: I've just released the final, final version of *Gwobby Strikes Back*; this was my first Turbo Basic game. I would really like to do some sort of scrolling game like *River Rat* and have decided to have another crack at assembler, as I never put the time in before. Just got a few registers to count up and down so far but it's already got that magic feel of learning to program for the first time.

RG: Who would you say are your programming heroes?
JK: I suppose anyone who has written games for the Atari home computers. A few of my favourite games are *Bounty Bob Strikes Back*, *Boulder Dash II*, *Donkey Kong* and *Ultima III*, but I also really like the ideas used for *Archon* and *Mail Order Monsters*.

RG: Finally, what advice can you give to anybody wanting to become involved in homebrew development?
JK: The forums such as AtariAge are superb places for help, without being ridiculed – usually! There are all levels of programmer, from those who can speak machine code to those who work in BASIC.

Start off typing a few bits in, modify some other people's code. Have a simple idea. Gameplay is what counts so focus on this. There are people who can assist with graphics and sounds later.

You can get much information from the web. There are many software competitions that are a good place to aim for and get your program known.

I like using the proper old hardware but there are loads of PC-based development tools that people are using these days.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

STAR LETTER

YOU HAD US AT STRIDER

Dear Retro Gamer,

I have it! I know your secret formula! Looking through issue 89 my eyes were drawn to the *Strider* cover in Back To The Eighties. This cover was special to me. It took me back to when I was a fraction of the age I am now, when I was captivated with the picture and the motto, 'A titanium blade, a heart of steel', and wanted it on my bedroom wall. My late dad and I went over to the church where he was choir master to borrow the photocopier, and he helped me copy the box art from my Spectrum version, enlarging it to a healthy A3 size. Back home and a few felt-tip pens later it was up on my wall. My dad's not around any more and this was a nice memory to remember.

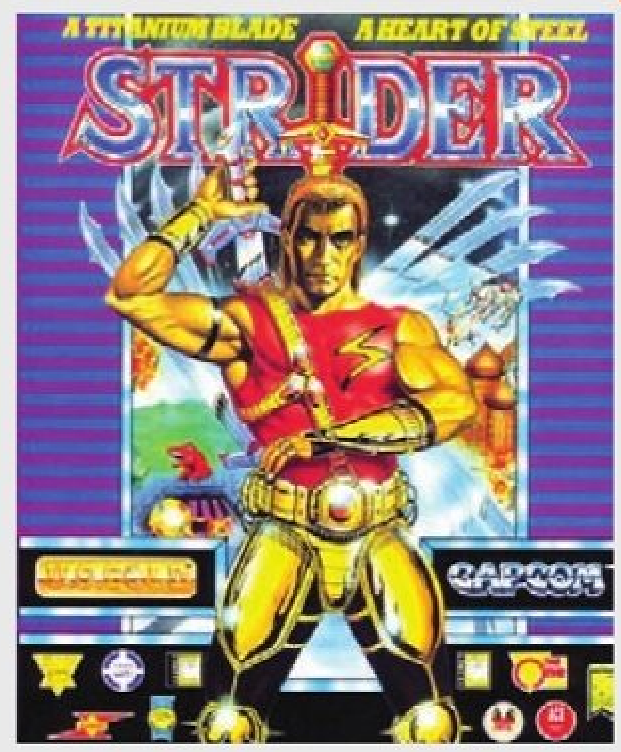
Then while writing this letter I recalled they had the arcade version of *Strider* down my local swimming pool, where my friends and I would play on it on a Saturday morning. There was a kid a few years above us who was much better, and we'd often watch him, transfixed.

This is the beauty of your magazine: to evoke memories I hadn't realised I'd forgotten. Not just memories of playing the games, but memories of times spent with friends and family, of who I was and what I was doing when they were out.

And this is your secret formula. In other mags every upcoming game is just hyperbole and hype. In your mag every game is a collection of memories that have already happened, different for every reader but never failing to take them back to some fond moment in their past.

So thanks. I look forward to every issue and each new set of memories.

Tim Fitches



It's nice to know we've helped to evoke some good memories, Tim. Like you, we think that nostalgia counts for a lot towards the magazine's appeal and is something that helps to separate us from other magazines. For making us feel so good about ourselves, enjoy being Star Letter.



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…

OBSCURE LOVE OBSCURE

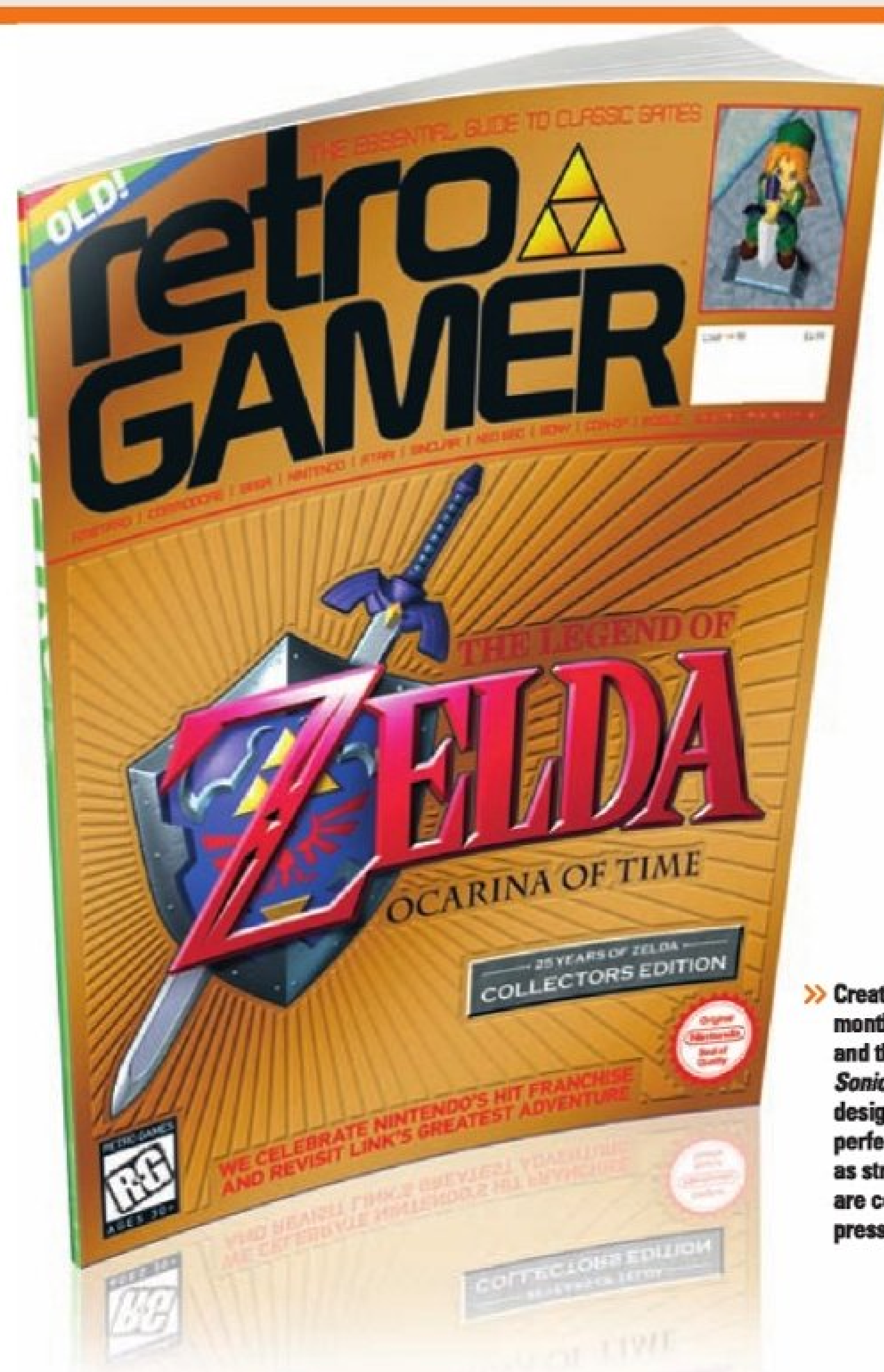
Dear Retro Gamer,

I've been an avid reader since issue 6 and love the magazine, but to this reader it appears to be running out of ideas. Now I don't mean that regarding presentation, which is always top notch, but in terms of article content. There seems to be more and more articles on recent games – and I'm not weighing into the 'what is and is not retro' debate as I reckon any last-gen console is fine to be covered – and more articles on games and machines already covered numerous times before. So, given that your readership is worldwide, why not start to include articles on machines that are less popular in the UK but popular or at least sold in other countries? It would be great to see the complete history on the TRS-80, a definitive rundown on the first micro with a 16-bit chip in it and lots of peripherals – the TI99/4A, and what about the weird and maybe wonderful obscure micros such as the Comex 35?

Keep up the great work but please increase the variety.

Cheers,

Grant Ferey, Australia



» **Creating last month's *Zelda* cover and this month's *Sonic* one, our new designer Kate has a perfect record as far as striking covers are concerned. No pressure, then, Kate.**

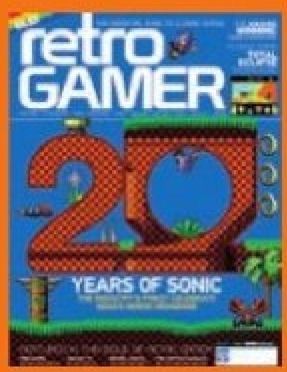
Thanks for the suggestions, Grant, but have you not read our new Obscura Machina feature? It's dedicated to flagging up obscure games consoles and computers. So far we've featured machines such as the Fairchild Channel F and the FM Towns Marty, neither of which took off on our shores, and in this issue we're covering the M2, which obviously never took off anywhere. We'll put the machines you've mentioned on the list to cover in future Obscura features. How's that sound?

A STEVE SUPPORTER

Hey dudes,

As a magazine that pays attention to its readers and their opinions, I feel it is my duty to email you my thoughts after reading Matthew Lightbourne's email (issue 89) before you do something drastic!

I think you do a grand job of weighing up how space in the magazine should devote to different retro gaming topics. Personally I think the N64 and friends should have space in your magazine. It has been a good 15 or so years and a lot has changed in



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>> YOUTUBE UPDATE

DARRAN'S DECIDED TO get back into collecting for the SNES, so recently treated himself to a US machine and a number of classic games. You can check out his latest bargains and then laugh at him when he caves and buys *Chrono Trigger*, despite the fact that it's now on the Virtual Console.

games since then! Plus not being able to afford every gaming system, some of us only grew up with its rivals, the PlayStation or Dreamcast, and found the N64 article quite informative. I also think you do a good job of writing about both the popular games that we all know and love and the not so popular but still very interesting games that only some of your readers have had the luxury of playing. I always feel special when one of my favourites gets a mention. Finally, I have to say I really enjoy how you talk about past magazines and how the media has portrayed games; I really enjoyed the article on *Bad Influence* and am craving for an article on *Amiga Power*!

On another note, I always meant to email you to say I think Steve does a great job as designer. Each article always seems to have a distinctive feel so I could easily find it in my binder! I've just found out he's leaving so I wanted to wish him good luck with **X360**. I'm sure you'll miss him but I have to admit to cheating on **Retro Gamer** and buying the odd **games™** for its retro section – I swear it's only when I'm catching a train and forgot to pack your mag – and you've done a good job on bagging Kate.

PS. Please think about the *Amiga Power* feature. Such a unique magazine and I threw all my copies away.

Thanks,

David

Cheers, David. Getting the content and right balance in the magazine isn't easy, but we think we do a pretty good job. We accept that for some readers the appeal of content will fluctuate from month to month, but there isn't a lot we can do about it. All we can do is ensure that we fill the magazine with interesting features each month and listen to your feedback. Steve will be sorely missed, but Kate has been doing a fantastic job since his departure, producing some superb covers such as our striking gold *Zelda* one last month, as well as this *Sonic* one you hold in your very hands.

SIMON IN THE MIDDLE

Dear Retro Gamer,

I am very upset. My brother is always angry. See, he sets fire to my mattress when I am trying to sleep, puts firecrackers in the twisty tails of our piglets, puts gunpowder in my microwavable popcorn bags when I am not looking, but, worst of all, he gives away or destroys all the games in my console collection he deems unworthy, and it is simply costing me a small fortune.

I need your guys' help at **RG**, desperately. Why, just the other day, you see, I took out *Mario Party 3* on my Nintendo 64 to give it a whirl, but when I went to the kitchen for a snack and came back I saw what seemed to be a brown, steaming model of the Tower of Hanoi sitting neatly atop the very recently crushed box and cartridge of said game, but which turned out not to be the classic Chinese puzzle but a fresh, perfectly sculpted human turd. Footprints leading from the crime scene and hideous, raucous laughter heard nearby suggested that, indeed, my brother not only had no mercy but probably no soul and a cold, black heart of bottomless depth. I think this time he has overstepped the limit and some sort of retribution, I am sure you will agree, must take place.

"It would be great to see a definitive rundown on the TRS-80"

RETRODATE PROFILE



Name: Yiu

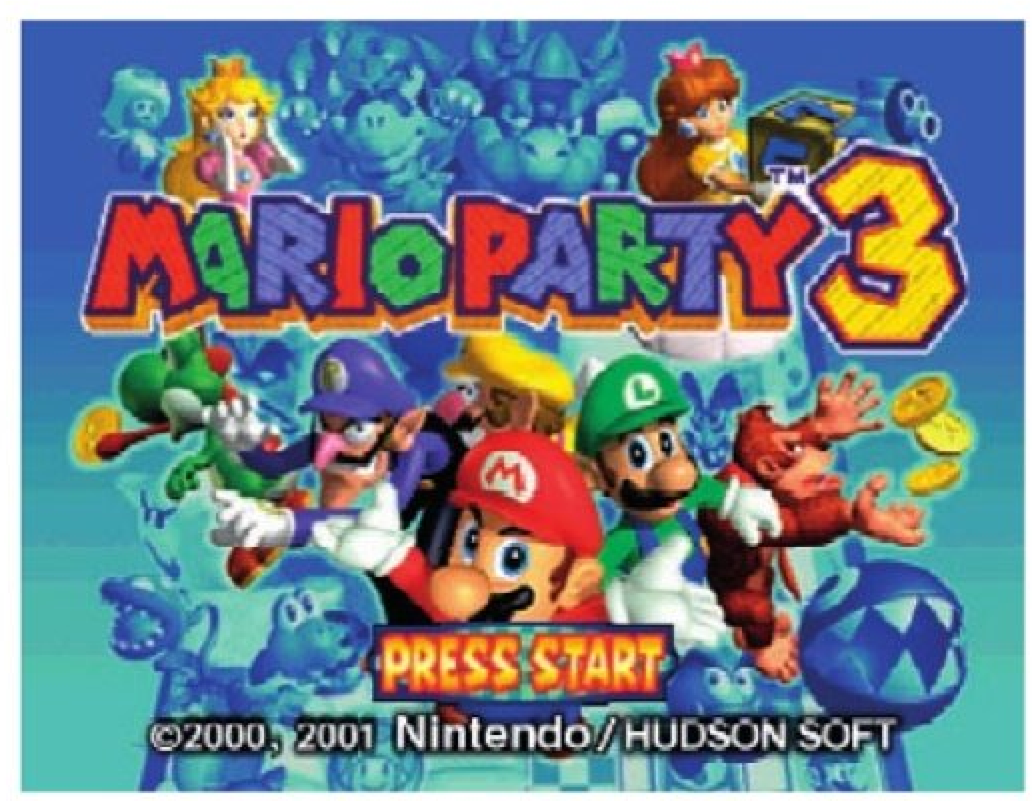
Joined: 7 October 2010

Location: Hong Kong

Occupation: Designer

Website: www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/pages/Yiu-Designer-Jewlry/145572018797381

Fave Games System: There's something to like on almost every system



>> **[N64] No matter what your opinion of the N64 or *Mario Party 3*, there is simply no excuse for what Simon's brother did.**

* BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



High Score: $85,240

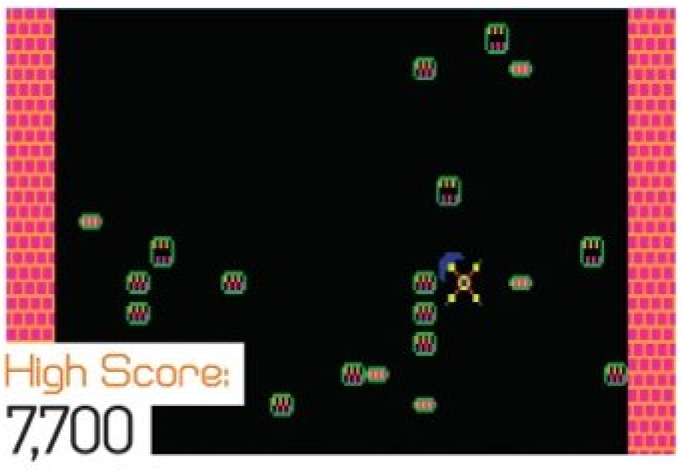


DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: SUNSET RIDERS

Why I picked it: It's superb and features cowboys and plenty of variety.

Handy tip: It's best to keep moving so rustlers can't lock on to you, and don't forget your dash attack. It can save your life.



High Score: 7,700

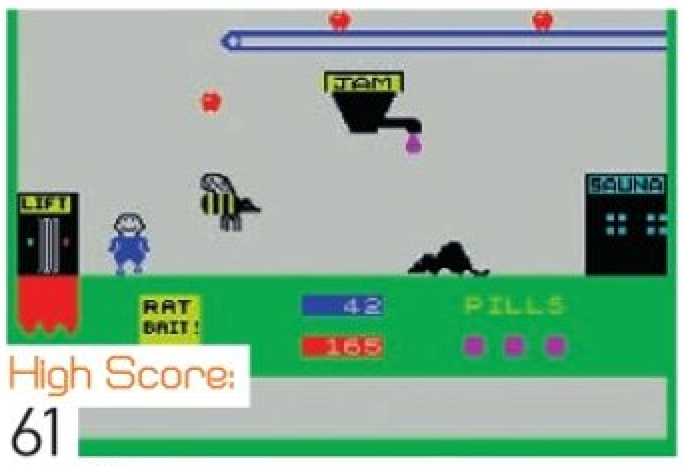


STUART

CHOSEN GAME: TAZZ-MANIA

Why I picked it: I thought it looked amusing, and it was surprisingly good.

Handy tip: The aim is to clear the screen of static sprites, therefore ignore the respawning, moving enemies and blast them only if you need to.



High Score: 61



MARTYN CARROLL

CHOSEN GAME: APPLE JAM

Why I picked it: It has a cult reputation for being one of the most brilliantly bonkers games on the Spectrum.

Handy tip: Prioritise apples over jam and time the lift so that it splats those pesky oversized rats.

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Sonic game?

jdanddiet *Sonic 2*. The pinnacle of the series and nothing since has persuaded me otherwise.

the_hawk I'm tempted to say *Sonic Colours* as I'm really, really enjoying it at the minute. Easily the best *Sonic* game for a long time, and a wonderful return to form. However, I'll have to be boring and plump for *Sonic 2*. It's just so damn good.

DigitalDuck Easily *Sonic 3 & Knuckles*. It's like *Sonic 2*, only six times as much of it, with three playable characters and special stages that don't annoy you.

ipmarks I'd have to be a bit predictable and say *Sonic 2*. It took everything that was good about *Sonic 1* and made it better, faster and more enjoyable. After *2* I got a bit tired of it, although the one with Knuckles was okay.

psj3809 It's the original for me. *Sonic 2* did improve on it but for me the best memories are playing *Sonic* when it first came out. The speed of it, the graphics, the sound – great nostalgic memories of the early Nineties.

nakamura *Sonic 1* on the Master System. While it lacks the wonderful visuals of its bigger brother, the hiding of the Chaos Emeralds inside the actual levels was a brilliant idea as it gave you a real reason to explore. Brilliant music also.

MattyC64c *Sonic 2* is still my favourite. It featured great levels like Mystic Cave and Oil Ocean, it introduced Super Sonic and had a great soundtrack. It's also the one that interests me the most due to all the stuff that didn't make it into the game: Wood Zone, the mysterious Genocide City Zone and, my favourite, the Hidden Palace Zone.

ShadowMan The first one quite simply because it's a classic and it was the first game I ever plugged into a Mega Drive. I do recall being quite amazed by the graphics for *Sonic 2*, but the nostalgia is for Sonic 1 for me.

Eric Original *Sonic* on the Mega Drive every time. One-button controls and no gimmicks or sidekicks. *Sonic CD* comes close with its great music and FMV cartoons. *Sonic 4* comes last out of all *Sonic* games.

Roo For all their awe-inspiring set-pieces, the dubious collision detection, questionable level design and complete lack of feel put me right off all the 3D *Sonic* games since the Dreamcast. *Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode I* was an almighty return to pre-Saturn form for the series. I thought Dimps absolutely nailed it, and created what might have been the best 2D platformer of this generation.

Hitman_HalStep Although I played the first the most it's got to be *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*. I found the special stages far less frustrating plus it just felt crisper, but only as a single character. Having a suicidal fox following me just wound me up.

ncf1 Maybe I'm the only one but I can't stand *Sonic* games. I play for about ten seconds, think, 'What on EARTH is going on?' and throw my joystick down in disgust before getting up to go to the kitchen to have some chips.

Megamixer The original every time. Just hearing the Green Hill Zone music start up evokes pure early Nineties nostalgia, I have to make an honourable mention of the Saturn game, *Sonic Jam*, though. Perfect ports of the four main Mega Drive games complete with the *Sonic & Knuckles* lock-on capabilities that some modern re-releases and compilation versions of the games still can't even manage to include.

thl *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* for the Mega Drive. It's an improvement to its predecessor that includes the new spin trick, the introduction of Tails and the ability to become Super Sonic. The stages were brilliantly designed, especially the Casino Night Zone that captured the spirit of Las Vegas.

bsg Ooooh, tasty subject. Initial reaction votes for *Sonic Adventure* on the Dreamcast – Orca… what can I say? – but part of me wants to say *Sonic CD* on the Mega-CD.

Alistair Aitcheson It's too often overlooked, but *Sonic Advance 3* is my hands-down favourite. Best levels in the series, managing to keep the pace up while also delivering some real teeth-grinding platforming action – especially with the ice stage boss!

They clearly learnt from the previous two *Advance* games, took the best bits of both, left out the worst, and then upped the ante. If you think *Sonic* hasn't been good since the Mega Drive, give this one a shot

Blumf *Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games* on the Wii. It's the one that me and the kids can play together, though everyone wants to be Sonic in the 100m.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

FIRST 'WOW' MOMENT

Neilos626 I went round my mate's after school to have a look at this new-fangled Super Famicom that he had just bought. First game he powered up was *Zelda: A Link To The Past* and it was no less than awesome.

snowkatt *Mario 64*, booting it up and realising I could go every where.

ipmarks *Knight Lore*. Simply incredible for its time.

IronMaidenRule Playing *Sensible Soccer* on my brother's Atari ST. Until then all the other football games were horrible, clunky things, but *Sensi* was pure beauty!

delbert_trout *Arrow Flash* on my mate's new Mega Drive, having only been used to 8-bit micros up to then. By the time we got on to *Sonic*, *Mercs* and *Revenge Of Shinobi* I just could not believe what I was seeing.

CHEATS IN MEMORY

Liamh1982 *Sonic 1* level select: up, down, left, right, A+start together at the title screen. *Sega Rally* to unlock the Stratos: X, Y, Z, Y, X at the main menu screen.

Dominoid Not really a cheat as such, but *Llamatron* on the ST had a thing where if you paused it just as you died (to a chant of "OHHHH") then he'd finish the phrase and it became "OHHH [censored]!" This was highly amusing when I was a kid.

RetroMartin *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap* – WE5T 10 and then 0 recurring all the way to the end. Can't remember what it does. Has the game 99 per cent complete with just the last boss to fight, I think?

adippm82 *3D Starstrike* on the Spectrum, pausing the game and then typing 'I wanna cheat'. Looking back on it, and the type of game it was, all rather pointless.

GAMING TURN-OFFS

Liamh1982 THAT box art still puts me off buying *Super Bust-A-Move* on PS2! Stupid baby.

sebadude That smug, smart arse narrator on *Theme Park World* – and the nonsensical sounds the characters make in *Civilization Revolution*.

skylarking A bad mini-game can put me off. I'm a bit dissuaded from getting further into *Alpha Protocol* because of the horrible hacking mini-game.

Lord Innit Any football game with a certain Man United player on the cover puts me right off any notion of buying that game.

necronom The lack of quality localisation in games. I find it extremely annoying when I'm playing a game, often made in the UK, and it's full of spelling mistakes. That's just embarrassing, and very unprofessional.

OLD vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which *Sega Rally* game is the best?

Sega Rally (Arcade/Saturn)



Sega Rally Online Arcade (XBLA)



73% | 27%

nakamura
It baffles me that in 1994 they can make a racer that is better than one in 2011.

felgekarp
The original is one of the most overrated games this world has ever seen.

HOT TOPIC

Best Treasure game



"Given their prices, I think only rich people can vote in the poll as most of us won't have played many of them. *Gunstar Heroes* is a fine game, though"
– Timothy Lumsden

"I went for *Guardian Heroes* as I spent so much time playing this with my mate on the Saturn"
– ChipTune

Please, guys, give me some sort of advice. Help me before he imparts his evil ways on any more classic games of times gone by and help save an innocent young man from grief, poverty and possible future alcoholism and spousal abuse.

Yours in kind,

"Simon", who might or might not be the brother of Matthew Lightbourne

If you are the brother of Matthew and this letter is indeed not a complete fabrication, we would certainly suggest that retribution is in order. Next time you get an inkling that your brother is going to defecate over one of your N64 games when your back is turned, when you announce that you're hungry, instead of walking into the kitchen to prepare yourself a snack, grab a camera instead. Then, immediately burst back into the lounge and snap him in the act of… well, that. Armed with photographic evidence, threaten that if he continues his disgusting ways you'll send the pictures to us.

STRAIGHT TO THE POINT

Hello,

Just to point out to you professionals at **RG**, *Super Mario Bros* was actually released a decade earlier in the UK than given on page 15 of issue 89. It was released on 15 May 1987, NOT 15 May 1997. So there.

Regards,

Harry Zing

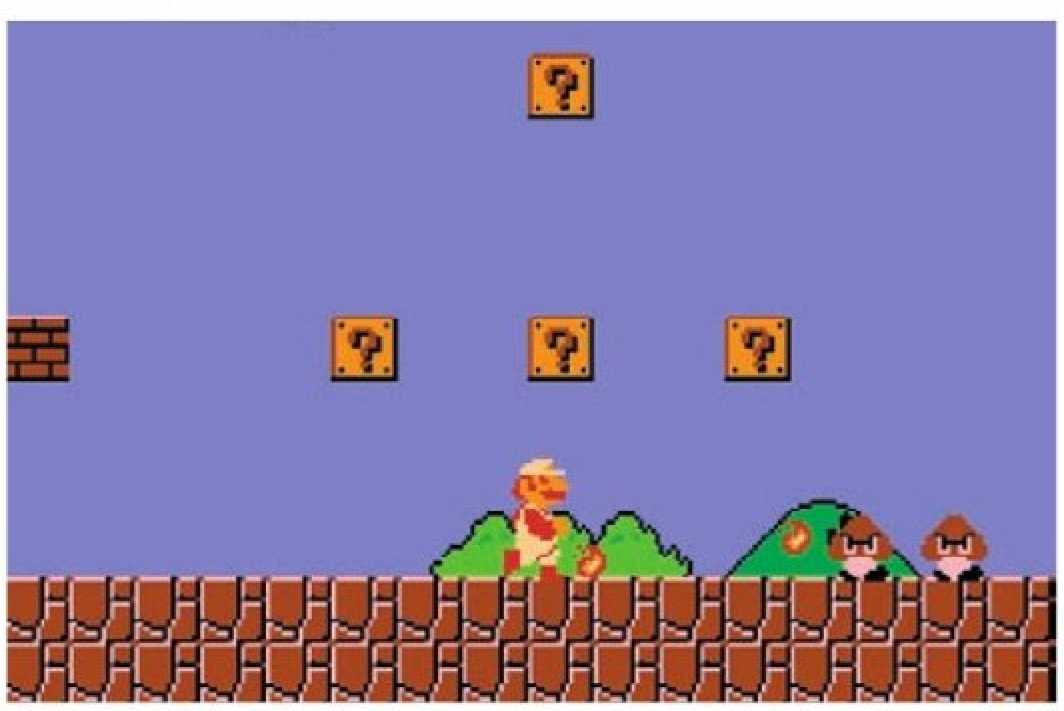
Yeah, we failed to spot that little error before the magazine went to print. We actually received quite a few emails from readers who spotted the mistake. We chose to print yours, Harry, as it was the shortest, and we also liked the fact that you called us professionals.

"I saw a brown, steaming Tower of Hanoi sitting neatly atop the former game"

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Stuart has a baby

This month Stuart's wife Helen gave birth to a beautiful baby girl named Jessica. Stuart was over the moon, and has been trying to get to grips with surviving on no sleep and playing the doting father. This included growing a beard and trying to act more grown up. As such, he has bubble wrapped every corner in his home, binned his razor and is now napping at his desk during lunch. And when discussion in the office turns to what games everyone's been playing, a little tear forms in his eye.



Just to clarify, *Super Mario Bros* wasn't released in May 1997, but actually 1987. As everyone knows, it was *Sonic The Hedgehog* that was released in 1997.

ARCADE ADVICE

Hi,

Thanks for a great mag. I've been looking for it since issue 1 and only found it about eight months ago, after scouring every newsagent near me. I eventually found it. I love retro things, so the mag is great as it's just like reliving my childhood.

Now, after the usual start, I could do with some help. I bought a full-size Sega *F1 Super Lap* arcade game to hopefully restore to its former glory, and after getting it for a 'bargain' £80 it's more than I can suss out. One screen doesn't come on and the boost buttons are missing. I knew it was a fixer-upper but I could do with some help. Can you offer any advice on where to look for bits as it seems to be a rare-ish coin-op?

If I ever get it fixed I wish to raffle it off for the charity I work for, **www.rossendaletrust.org**. Any help is greatly appreciated!

Ben Roscoe

We're no experts on arcade restoration, but we suggest registering on Jamma+ (www.jammaplus.co.uk), and asking for some advice on the forums. There you'll find plenty of friendly and helpful arcade collectors who really know their stuff.

CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN

Catan HD

I've become addicted to the *Settlers Of Catan* board game so was delighted to discover an iPad version. The best part? You can take it anywhere you go, it's easy to set up, and you won't get constantly beaten by your kids.





STUART

Assassin's Creed Brotherhood

I really enjoyed *Assassin's Creed II*, so was quick to pick up *Brotherhood*, only to put it in a drawer and forget all about it. With a new game in the works I thought I'd finally make a start on it. I also needed the drawer space.





MARTYN

Tomb Raider Anniversary

I played this while PSN was down. A fantastic update of Lara's best adventure. Lovely atmosphere, and just the right level of difficulty – although I'm hopeless when it comes to wall-running with the grapple.

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We chart the rise and fall of Final Fight, one of Capcom's most important scrolling fighter franchises

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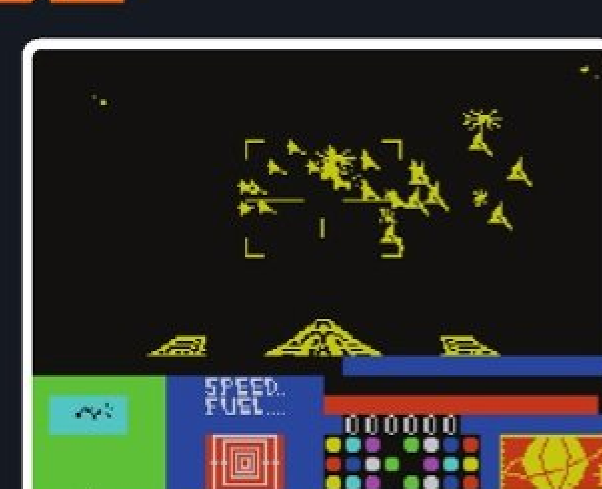
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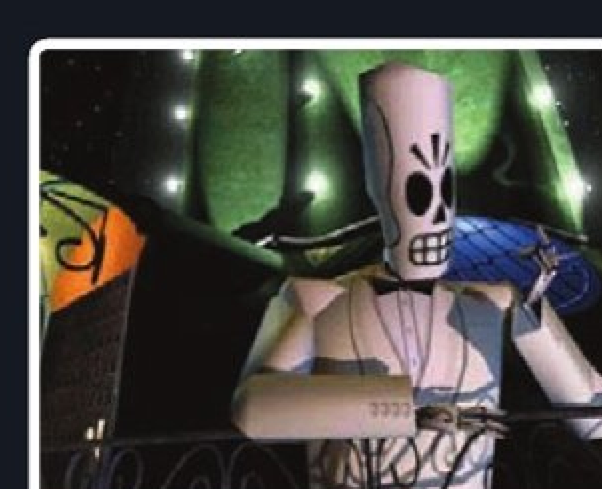
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Steve Turner

■ He's been behind classic conversions and co-formed Graftgold – Steve Turner discusses his illustrious past



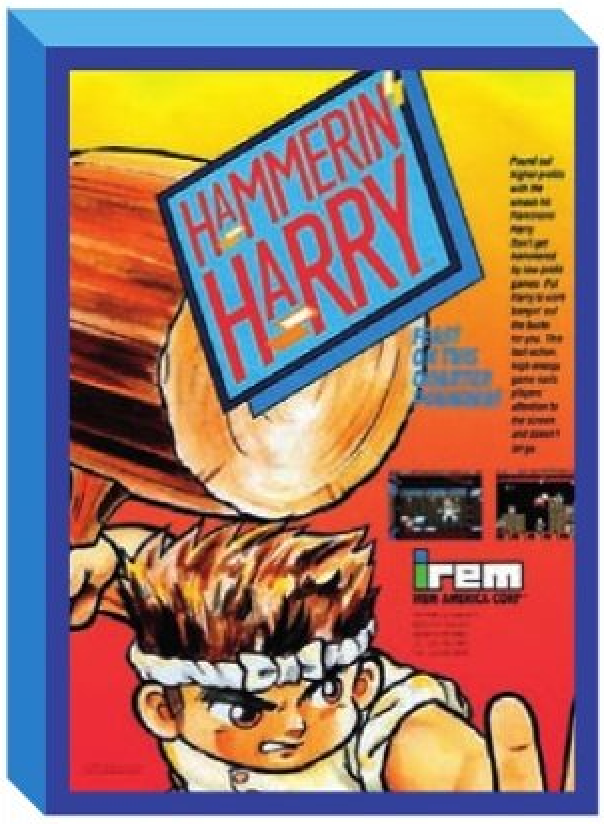
Grim Fandango

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ENDGAME



HAMMERIN' HARRY

» When Harry finds his home has been demolished by a greedy construction company, he decides to take matters into his own hands. Staring red-eyed at the ruin, he spots his huge, oversized hammer lying on the floor. Picking it up, he gets the sudden urge to dash around the construction site and violently attack the workers until he gets to see the man in charge.



01

» Harry arrives at the office of the owner of the construction company, but the meeting turns sour when compensation is mentioned and the boss takes to the air in a flying office chair and starts throwing explosive dollar bills.



02

» Harry clobbers the boss to the floor. The building magnate then tries to tempt Harry with a cash bribe, promising him riches beyond his wildest dreams if he drops the mallet and never mentions the truth about him being half office chair.



03

» Believing that money isn't the solution to every problem, rather than accept the offer of wealth Harry picks up his trusty hammer and uses it to shamefully torture the boss with. The entire scene is thankfully censored out.



04

» Unfeasibly, in the next scene the greedy boss is knocked into a state of enormous wellbeing. He's appreciative, thanking Harry by way of a terrible pun, and promising to put things right and get Harry's hammer cleaned and encrusted in solid white gold.



05

» At the end of the craziest meeting ever, a contract is drawn up that states the company owner will agree to rebuild Harry's home when his workers are discharged from hospital. With the house rebuilt, everyone becomes friends and poses for a photo.


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